Polly Brewster

POLLY OF PEBBLY PIT

Lillian Roy

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OF PEBBLY PIT

By

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POLLY'S BUSINESS VENTURE
POLLY AND ELEANOR
POLLY IN NEW YORK
POLLY AND HER FRIENDS ABROAD

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POLLY OF PEBBLY PIT

CHAPTER I

THE FARM IN PEBBLY PIT

"POLLY! POLL-EE!" sounded musically from the direction of the kitchen doorway in a ranch-house, and reached Polly Brewster as she knelt beside her pet in the barn.

"Run outside and see what Maw wants, Poll," said Mr. Brewster, who was working faithfully over the object of Polly's solicitous devotion.

Obediently, Polly ran out and shaded her eyes as she gazed across the great depression of the volcanic crater which had made such a wonderful farm for the Brewsters. At the door of the long, squat homestead, stood Mrs. Brewster, waiting for an answer.

The moment she saw Polly, she called: "Din-ner-r's ready!"

"All right!" shouted the girl, waving her sun-

bonnet to signify she had heard the message.

Mrs. Brewster returned to the kitchen and Polly went back to her father's side. He glanced up as she entered the barn, and Polly replied to his questioning look.

"Maw said dinner's ready."

"Well, Ah reckon Noddy's all right now, Poll," said the rancher, as he stood up to stretch his tired muscles.

"I felt sure she would be, Paw," returned Polly, positively.

"If only Jeb was about, now, Ah could leave him with Noddy, with directions about the medicine, till we-all get back from dinner," mused Mr. Brewster, standing in the doorway to look about for Jeb.

"Why, Daddy! Do you suppose I'd leave Noddy with Jeb for a single moment? And just as we saved her life, too! I reckon not! I'll stop here myself and watch her," declared Polly with finality, as she assumed the post vacated by her father, and held the little burro's fuzzy head upon her knees.

Sam Brewster smiled as he watched Polly bend over her pet and whisper affectionately in the long, sensitive ear.

"Poll, Jeb will shore say you used witchcraft

on the burro; he said Noddy was done for—being buried under that slide the way she was."

"Noddy *would* have been done for if Jeb had had her in charge; but she just couldn't refuse to live, with me right here calling her back, you know. She loves me so, she had to listen to my voice," explained Polly, with suspicious moisture in her big blue eyes.

"Ah reckon that's it, Poll! Love works wonders if we'd only *let* it. And you love everything in a way that everything loves you back again. It beats me, how the beavers, and foxes, and even the bears treat you as if you were one of them, instead of running to cover. As for the chicks and colts and lambs on the ranch—why, they'd follow you to Oak Creek, if they could!"

Polly smiled happily as she looked away over the distant mountain-sides where Nature's creatures roamed unrestrained. And then her eyes rested upon the pastures nearer home, where the farm pets grazed. Every one of them, wild or tame, were her friends.

"Reckon Ah'll go now, Poll. What shall Maw do about the dinner?"

"Tell her not to bother about me. I'll wash the dishes when I get back, Daddy."

So Mr. Brewster started for the house and

Polly settled herself in a more comfortable position while crooning to little Noddy. As she sat holding the little burro's head, her thoughts wandered back to the time when Noddy was but three days old. The mother had died and left the tiny bundle of brown wool to be brought up on a nursing bottle. To keep the baby burro warm it had been wrapped in an old blanket and placed back of the kitchen stove. Thus Noddy first learned to walk in the large kitchen of the log ranch-house, and later it felt quite like a member of the family.

Being such a sleepy little colt, the name of Noddy was considered very appropriate but, as the burro grew older, it showed such intelligence and energy that its name was a dreadful misnomer.

Noddy considered Polly her particular charge and followed her about the place like a dog. And when the burro was full-grown, she became the daily companion that Polly rode to school, over the mountain trails, or about the farm.

The wise western burros are not half appreciated by folks who do not understand their unusual intelligence and their devotion to their masters. They will seek for water or edible herbs when lost on the desert or mountain peaks and sacrifice life to save that of the rider's.

But Noddy's present condition was not due to sacrifice. Most of the horses and burros at Pebbly Pit showed such an aversion to the Rainbow Cliffs that they never grazed near there, although the luxuriant grass made fine pasturage. These cliffs were the local wonder and gave the farm its name. They were a section of jagged "pudding-stone" wall composed of large and small fragments of gorgeously hued stones massed together in loose formation, like shale. Great heaps of these jeweled fragments, which crumbled easily from the cliff, lay piled up along the base of the wall and sparkled brilliantly when the sun shone upon them, or directly after a rain.

Noddy had been pasturing out the night before her accident, and at sunrise found herself too near the tabooed cliffs. She lifted her ears suspiciously, wrinkled her nose fearfully, and wheeled to run away to a more desirable locality. But in that quick turn she loosened the shale at the base of a steep descent. The treacherous rock slid and threw her down. Before she could get up and away the great mass rumbled down and covered her, but she finally managed to work her head free for breath.

Jeb, out early to seek for stray cattle, saw the fresh slide and gazed wonderingly at it. Then he

spied the nose and hoof of a burro protruding from the shale. He rushed to the barn where he had left Mr. Brewster, and in a short time master and man had the tools and "cradle" back at the spot, and Noddy was soon unearthed. She was unconscious, and Jeb declared it was useless to bother with a burro so evidently far gone. Even Mr. Brewster feared she was past help, but Polly insisted that Noddy must live.

All that morning Polly sat holding the limp brown head while whispering words of affection in the long ears, and who will say that Noddy's instinct did not respond to love, even though the physical sense of hearing was deaf to earthly sounds? She slowly revived and was resting comfortably when the house-call came for dinner.

Mr. Brewster returned after dinner, bringing a bowl of gruel for the burro, and Jeb followed his master to inquire about the patient.

"Jeb, you-all help me feed Noddy while Polly runs to the house for her dinner," said Mr. Brewster.

"I'd a heap rather wait here and help with Noddy, Paw!"

"Oh, Polly! Maw told me to say there was a letter for you. Jim Melvin stopped off with our mail he got at Oak Creek to-day."

"A letter! Who can it be from?" asked Polly wonderingly.

"That's what you must find out. It looks like a girl's writing and it is post-marked Denver. Who do you know there?" replied her father.

"Denver? Why, nobody! I'll run and see who it's from!" cried she eagerly, and Mr. Brewster smiled at the success of the ruse to get his daughter away for a time.

Polly was a genuine child of Nature. Her life of little more than fourteen years had been spent in the mountains surrounding her ranch-home, Pebbly Pit. The farm was oddly located in the crater of an extinct volcano, known on the maps as "The Devil's Grave." Like many other peaks scattered about in this region of Colorado, the volcanic fires had been dead for centuries.

The outer rim of the crater formed a natural wall about the bowl, and protected the rich and fertile soil of the farm from the desert winds that covered other ranches with its fine alkali dust. The snows in winter, lodging in the crevices of the cliffs, slowly melted during the progress of summer, thus furnishing sufficient moisture for the vegetation growing in the "bowl"; and this provided splendid pasturage for the herds of cattle owned by the rancher.

When Sam Brewster staked his claim in this crater, his companions jeered at the choice and called the place "Pebbly Pit." But the young man had studied agriculture thoroughly and knew what he was doing; then the test made by the government convinced him of this.

Besides, his Denver bride preferred the beauty of the spot to the more sociable but draughty ranches in the valley of Bear Forks River; so they settled in the crater, and named the farm Rainbow Cliffs, but the original nick-name clung, and gradually the owners, from habit, also came to call their place "Pebbly Pit."

In the mountains where the government gives a settler all the timber he needs, transportation is so difficult and paid labor almost unknown, so that the size and quality of a rancher's house and out-buildings expresses his character. Sam Brewster's buildings and fences were as solid and comfortable as any in the State. He and his wife (a refined young woman) were ambitious and energetic, so it was not surprising that they succeeded in life.

When John, the first-born, had completed his studies at High School in Denver, he was sent to a well-known college in Chicago. And now that Polly, seven years John's junior, had finished her

grammar course at the little Bear Forks log school-house, she, too, was determined to enter High School at Denver.

Sam Brewster had stubbornly refused to consent to the plan, taking for an excuse that no friends or relatives remained in Denver where Polly might board, and commutation was out of the question. But he knew, and so did his wife, that the truth of his refusal lay in the fact that he could not bear to part with his youngest child—even though she visited at home each week-end.

Mrs. Brewster sided with Polly's ambition, and planned to visit her old home in Denver to see if she could find any friends who would prove to be desirable for Polly to associate with. The matter stood thus this lovely June day when the unexpected letter arrived.

The very unusual occurrence created enough interest for Polly to take her mind from the burro, so she ran swiftly towards the house while every possible correspondent she could think of passed through her thoughts. But she was as much at sea as ever, when she danced up the log steps leading directly to the kitchen.

"Maw, Maw! Where are you—is there really a letter?"

"Yes—from Denver! But how is Noddy?"

replied Mrs. Brewster, coming to the kitchen door, holding a square envelope in her hand.

"Dear little Noddy—she is all right now, Maw, but it looked mighty bad a bit of time back. I just had to pray and *pray* with all my might, Maw —you know how!" sighed Polly, taking the refined-looking letter from her mother without seeing it.

"I never knew *how* I loved that dear little bundle of fuzz and flesh till I thought she was dead! Oh, I am so glad she will live that I don't care if I ever eat again or not!"

Still holding the precious letter, Polly turned back to look at the barn where the object of her love was lapping up the gruel. Mrs. Brewster smiled indulgently at her intense young daughter, then reminded her of the unopened communication.

"Dear me! So much excitement in one day—I don't see how I can quiet down again. But *who* do you suppose would write to *me?*" queried Polly, holding the envelope at arm's length and studying the hand-writing.

"I'm not clairvoyant, Polly, so suppose you open it and see for yourself," laughed Mrs. Brewster.

"Well, I hate to spoil this nice stationery but—

here it goes!" murmured Polly, severing an end of the envelope as if she was the executioner of an innocent victim.

"See who it's from, Polly, while I dish up your dinner. Of course you don't care whether you ever eat again, but I would suggest that at least you strive to ward off starvation," remarked her mother, teasingly, as she took a well-filled plate from the oven.

"Wh-h-y—of all things!" gasped Polly, as she read the letter quickly.

Mrs. Brewster stood waiting to hear more, and Polly gave another hurried glance at the signature before explaining.

"It's from Anne Stewart—the girl who used to teach at Bear Forks school that time the teacher got sick and had to leave for a few months. You know—the pretty one with the blonde hair that all the big scholars raved over?" announced Polly.

"Oh, yes! The one that you said was so happy to be in this wonderful country?"

"Yes, that's the girl! Well, guess what she writes me?" And Polly waved the written sheet above her head.

"Polly, have you been writing to her about High School?" hurriedly asked Mrs. Brewster.

"I never thought of that! Maybe we can plar

it with her," returned Polly, her expression changing instantly to meet the new suggestion of her mother's.

"Well, time enough to settle that question. Now tell me what she wrote," declared Mrs. Brewster, sighing with relief.

"You'll be taken right off your feet, Maw, so you'd best sit down and listen," advised Polly, nibbling at a biscuit while she waited for her mother to be seated.

"Now, I don't want you to shake your head or say a word, until I'm all through reading, Maw. It's something terribly surprising and goodness only knows why she asked *me*. I was so young when she taught school that she never noticed me much."

"Yes, you were *so* much younger two years ago, and you are so very ancient now!" retorted Mrs. Brewster, trying to appear serious.

"You know what I mean—but this isn't reading you the letter and I know just how you'll gasp when you hear her brother—listen and I'll read it."

CHAPTER II

A MOMENTOUS LETTER

HAVING seen that her mother was seated and ready for the surprise, Polly read:

"DEAR MISS POLLY:

"As you are fast reaching the boundary-line where girlhood and womanhood meet, I feel I must address you with the prefix that dignifies this stage of your life, although I seem to know you best as the rosy-cheeked little girl whose name of 'Polly' seemed to fit her exactly.

"Perhaps your mother will be surprised that I did not write this letter to her, as most of it concerns her and her family directly. But I can best explain why I am writing to you by the following:

"My brother Paul and your brother John are chums in college, you know, and I heard quite recently that you wished to prepare for High School in Denver this fall. When a friend in Chicago wrote me to find a good home in the mountains near Denver where I can stay with and tutor his daughters during the summer, I thought of the region

about Bear Forks. Having been there myself, I know how wonderful the country and climate are.

"If your mother and yourself think well of my proposition, I know I can help you a great deal, also, towards preparing you for High School, as I will have to devote a short time each day this summer in keeping Eleanor up in her studies.

"Last year Eleanor and Barbara Maynard, of Chicago, came to board with us in Denver. These girls are acquainted with Paul and John, through their brother who is a class-mate of the boys. The younger girl, Eleanor, who is your age, had been very ill and the doctor ordered her to Denver because of the wonderful air. Her sister, who is about my age, accompanied her. The father, Mr. Maynard, engaged me to tutor Eleanor, or Nolla we call her, during her stay in Denver, as she was backward in lessons.

"We three became very good friends and when the girls went back to Chicago, I missed their companionship very much. I had a letter from the father last week, asking me to find a mountain resort for this summer where he could send the girls, as Nolla needs the invigorating air and simple life of the Rockies. She is organically sound but not strong enough to stand city air and life.

"Mr. Maynard has been through the Bear Forks country and when I wrote suggesting a ranch there, he immediately wired me to settle the matter at once. To-day I had a letter from the mother who cannot go with her daughters for the summer, so she asked me to go with them, more as a friend and adviser

than as a tutor. My expenses will be paid, and my salary for tutoring Nolla will be a blessing to help Paul through his third year's term of the college course.

"I know your brother is away with Tom Latimer on some practice work with a survey crew, so his room is vacant this summer. Then too, I was told by John that you had a small spare room back of the kitchen, so that three girls could have comfortable quarters. If, by any chance, your mother would consent to take us in for the summer, I could help you with your preparatory lessons for High School next term, at the same time that I coach Nolla. And I will agree for myself and the two girls that we will not expect any other than your usual home-life.

"This unexpected request may meet with disapproval and refusal by your family, but do not let one of the causes be on the grounds of the extra work we might create, because we do not want any fussing, whatever, but we do want to be treated as members of the family—to do our share of anything that needs to be done.

"Mr. Maynard wishes his girls to live in the outdoors as much as possible, so we will not be in your mother's way. I certainly hope your father and mother will allow us to come, and I can promise you that you will enjoy these girls very much. The terms are of no consequence, Mr. Maynard said, as he is ready to pay anything to give Nolla a quiet home and the life she needs.

"I trust you can persuade your mother to try us,

at any rate, and so, hoping for a favorable reply to this letter,

"I am your sincere friend,

"ANNE STEWART."

While Polly read the letter aloud, her mother thought rapidly. She had the picture of a charming girl who had often met John Brewster at social gatherings during the term she taught the children at Bear Forks. Now her brother Paul was one of John's chums at college. Perhaps this girl had visited at Chicago, and perhaps John had visited her home at Denver—but he had never said a word about it. It was very evident that this girl had an intimate acquaintance with the home-life at Pebbly Pit, and this knowledge must have reached her through John. Hence John and she must be very well acquainted. John would doubtless marry some day, but his mother did not care to see him entangled before he had launched his bark on the waters of his ambition. If he was touched by one of Cupid's darts to fancy himself in love with his chum's pretty sister, it was good judgment for his mother to know all there was to be known about the girl. Not that the letter confessed this state of affairs, but the mother

feared that such must be the case—for who could resist loving her handsome, clever boy?

"Maw! I *said*—— Anne Stewart is perfectly lovely!"

"Oh, yes, Polly! So I believe," replied Mrs. Brewster, in an absent-minded manner.

"Well! If you'd let them come here I would love it!"

"You can't judge beforehand, Polly. Having three city strangers come suddenly to live at a ranch where city manners are unknown, will turn things upside-down, you know."

"But you see, Maw, the teacher offers to help me with lessons so I can pass for High School in the fall," Polly reminded her mother.

"I can do as much for you, dear, without the care of strangers," remonstrated Mrs. Brewster, who would not commit herself until she had had time to weigh all things carefully.

"Then I s'pose you intend refusing this request!" pouted the disappointed girl.

"I wish to think over the situation most wisely before we reply to the letter. Now finish your dinner and do the dishes. I am going to take my mending to the side porch."

Polly did as she was told but her imagination

strayed to Denver and Chicago, as she tried to picture Barbara and Eleanor Maynard with Anne Stewart, visiting Pebbly Pit that summer. Meantime, Mrs. Brewster considered the *pros* and *cons* of the problem. If this Anne Stewart proved to be the sort of wife John needed, it would be advisable to have her know her future family-in-law. If she was not desirable, it would be discovered during the weeks she lived under the same roof with John's mother. But should it transpire that there was no cause for worry about John and this young teacher, she would still prove to be a good friend for Polly to know in case the child attended school in Denver the following term. Mrs. Brewster had almost decided to speak favorably to Polly of the plan, when the girl joined her on the porch.

"Do you suppose Daddy will mind having so many young folks about the place—that is, if you will let them come?"

"I'm sure your Paw will be happy to give you pleasure, and you know how glad he is to have young people visiting here, rather than having you leave home to visit others," remarked Mrs. Brewster, slowly drawing the yarn through a hole in a sock.

"While I washed the dishes, I wondered if he

would say anything to you about the extra work the three girls will make?" said Polly, trying to "feel" her mother out.

"That will be his main objection, I think. He had planned for me to visit my old friends in Denver, this summer, but this new departure will make it impossible for me to be away from here."

"Oh, Maw, if you want to go away, don't let these girls spoil your plans!" cried Polly, contritely.

"I really had not thought of my own pleasure in visiting old friends at Denver, Polly, but I had planned to see about your residence this winter should you attend school there. I want you to board with a family that can offer you the proper atmosphere. If this young teacher proves to be nice, she will know all I needed to find out about the school and a boarding house, and I will not have to leave my beloved home at all."

"Well, then, it all depends on what Daddy will say!" cried Polly, joyously. "I do wish he'd hurry in."

"He must have known your wishes, Polly; I see him coming towards the house," laughed Mrs. Brewster.

Polly leaned over the hand-rail of the porch to watch her father coming nearer and nearer. Then,

when she thought he was in hailing distance, she shouted:

"Daddy! Do hurry and hear the news—came in my letter!" And the missive was waved back and forth to urge the rancher to greater speed.

Mr. Brewster reached the porch and whipped off his wide sombrero to mop his warm forehead. "Well, Maw, did Poll tell you about Noddy? Ah tell you! Our Polly is some doctor, all right!"

As the rancher chuckled over his words, Polly felt she had been guilty of neglect, for she had quite forgotten to ask how Noddy was. Mrs. Brewster smiled as she continued her darning.

"Who's with Noddy now—did you give Jeb careful instructions, Paw?" anxiously queried Polly.

"Noddy's sleeping as peacefully as a babe, so you-all needn't worry any more. Now tell me all about the wonderful letter."

"Sam, do you remember that golden-haired young lady from Denver, who took Miss Shalp's place at Bear Forks school for a few months?" quickly asked Mrs. Brewster.

The note of anxiety in the query was not overlooked by the rancher, but he answered indifferently—to all appearances:

"Shore thing, wife. Could any one forget such a nice girl in a hurry?"

"Well, Sam, the letter's from her—Anne Stewart is her name."

"Don't tell him what! Let me read it, Maw!" cried Polly.

So the letter was read again and the moment it was concluded Polly and Mrs. Brewster looked fearfully at Mr. Brewster, for they both expected violent objections from him.

But the rancher stood boring a hole with the toe of his boot down through the soft grass sod, while he seemed to study the cobbler's handiwork. After a few moments of tense silence, he looked up and laughed heartily.

"Who'd have thought it, Mary? You, young looking enough to pass for a blushing bride but having a son old enough to think of a sweet-heart. And little Poll here, trying to bamboozle us to let her go away to school. Ah, well!"

Polly gazed from father to mother and back again. "What has John got to do with this letter? Gracious, he isn't thinking of a wife, I hope!"

Her parents laughed at her perplexity, and Mr. Brewster explained satisfactorily to her question:

"I was thinking of the four pretty girls we'd have at the ranch all summer, if John comes home to choose one of them."

"Oh, Daddy! Then you'll have them come?" cried Polly, at the same time jumping at her father to throw her arms about his neck.

"On one condition—yes. That is: a gal to do the chores for Maw, so she can look after such a handful of trouble as three new ready-made daughters will make for her."

"A hired girl! Why, Sam, how you talk. What could I ever do with help in such a small house? Besides, Anne Stewart says they will help with the work," objected Mrs. Brewster.

"That's my only condition! You're not going to slave for a lot of city girls if I know it. Why, they won't know how to hold a kitchen knife, let alone cook for the family," replied Mr. Brewster.

"I'll agree at once, Sam, because I know there isn't a girl or woman to hire within fifty miles of Oak Creek," laughed Mrs. Brewster.

"Then Polly can answer the letter as she likes, and I will hunt up a gal. You said it: you'd agree to hire help if one can be found!" quickly came from the rancher.

"Sam, you took this occasion to have your own

way about hired help," laughed his wife, shaking her head deprecatingly.

"You never would listen before, but now you've got to!" said Mr. Brewster, triumphantly.

"Polly, you can run in and answer that letter as soon as you like," hinted Mrs. Brewster, and the girl eagerly obeyed.

While she wrote the answer over and over till it met with her approval, her parents exchanged confidences regarding John and this young teacher, but Polly never dreamed of such fears.

The letter that left Pebbly Pit the following day was the first thread woven in the warp and woof of two young lives—Eleanor Maynard in Chicago and Polly Brewster in the Rockies. Had the reply been other than it was, would these two girls have met and experienced the interesting schooldays, college years, and business careers that they enjoyed through becoming acquainted that summer at Pebbly Pit?

CHAPTER III

PREPARING FOR THE UNKNOWN

THE letter sent from Pebbly Pit to Anne Stewart was forwarded by the latter to the Maynard girls in Chicago. It was eagerly read aloud to Mrs. Maynard by Barbara. Reaching the paragraph in the letter where Mrs. Brewster asked Anne Stewart if she thought five dollars a week for the board of each would be asking too much, Barbara dropped the sheet of paper and gasped. An expression of incredulity appeared on the faces of the mother and daughter, while Eleanor laughed outright.

"Just fancy! Five dollars a week!" she cried, throwing herself back on the cushions of the divan.

"It must be a mistake! I trust it isn't meant for fifty a week! That is about the price a good hotel would charge, but I had hoped this place would be more reasonable. However, I am quite sure that figure five is a mistake; no one can possibly give meals at that rate, no matter how

meager the fare may be!" declared Mrs. Maynard.

"The writing is plain enough and so is the figure '5,' mother," returned Barbara, referring again to the letter, then handing it to her mother.

Mrs. Maynard adjusted her lorgnette and studied the figure given. "It *does* seem to be five, without a doubt!" admitted she.

"Oh, well! it really doesn't matter much what the price is just as long as we have a good time this summer!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"But, Nolla, dear, it does matter! Your father is dreadfully upset about our plans. He says my Newport season will cost far more than I fancied it would, and you two girls going to a mountain resort like this is an extra cost. He will have to be away all summer on important business connected with the bank, and *that* will cost extra money. Altogether, he feels anything but indifferent," sighed Mrs. Maynard, handing the letter back to Barbara.

"Well, we are not responsible for father's worries over the bank's loans, but we *are* concerned about the style and quality of meals to be served at this Brewster place for five dollars a week," scorned Barbara.

"I don't believe Anne Stewart would take us to

a place where anything was horrid and cheap! She knows what's good as well as we do!" defended Eleanor, who was eager to go to this mountain ranch.

"Nolla is quite right, Bob. Anne is too particular to engage board in an undesirable house or hotel!" added Mrs. Maynard.

"Besides, these Brewsters have a farm, you know, and I suppose they raise lots of things that we have to pay such awful prices for—eggs, chickens, butter and vegetables," added Eleanor.

Mrs. Maynard and Barbara looked with admiration at the young girl, for that was an idea they had not thought of!

"Of course, that's why they can board us so reasonably! Then, too, I suppose they do their own marketing for other items of food, such as delicacies and supplies from the baker's! It does make a difference in the accounts, you see, when one markets!" ventured Barbara, glancing at her mother who never bothered about anything connected with the housekeeping—leaving it all for the servants to do.

"Now, Bob, don't criticize your mother's methods. I can't drudge about the house and take charge of the Social Clubs and Welfare Work as well," complained Mrs. Maynard.

"Of course not, Bob! Besides, mother never did know a good cut of beef from a poor one—they never taught domestic science in her day, you see," hurriedly interpolated Eleanor, hoping to waive a scene such as was a common occurrence between Barbara and her mother.

"Nolla, are you sarcastic about my education?" queried Mrs. Maynard, with dignity.

"Mercy, no! I only tried to show Bob the difference in present day methods and the past."

Mr. Maynard entered the room during Eleanor's reply, and smiled as he heard his youngest daughter's frank words. It was a keen pleasure to him to have one child fearless in thought and word. His son and elder daughter had been spoiled by fawning tutors and companions, so they had acquired the habit of white-washing facts to suit the needs. Eleanor had been too delicate to attend any expensive and fashionable seminary and, being taught by Anne Stewart while in Denver, had acquired many of Anne's splendid ways.

"Frederick, what do you know about this mountain resort you asked Anne Stewart to write about?" asked Mrs. Maynard.

"Well, now that we are all together and have the time to talk this matter out, I will say my say," replied Mr. Maynard, seating himself and

drawing Eleanor down beside him upon the divan.

"You remember the first year we were married —I had to visit Bear Forks to investigate a loan one of our clients at the bank asked us to make on a tract of timber-land? You wouldn't go with me when you heard we would have to camp out at night and ride horses over rough mountain-trails. That is the season you visited your school-friend in the East."

Mr. Maynard looked at his wife as he spoke and she nodded her head as if the memory was not pleasant to recall. Her husband smiled an enigmatical smile and continued his description.

"That is when I met Sam Brewster and his wife—they had been married about as long as we had, and their happy ranch-life struck me as being the most desirable existence I ever heard of."

Mrs. Maynard's lips curled in silent derision. She understood her husband's yearning for a simple life in place of the frivolous and empty excitement of the social career she had made for herself and family.

"The country about the sections I visited is beautiful and healthy, and as Nolla is ordered to a quiet, mountainous region for a time, I know of no place so suitable. Besides, Anne Stewart

has been there, too, and she is wild over the place."

"But you are so old-fashioned in your ideas of living and pleasures, father, and I want to know if this place will suit me. Are the Brewsters members of the best set there, or will I be left absolutely unaided to find a way to meet young people such as we would like to know?" asked Barbara, anxiously.

"The Brewsters are by far the wealthiest family in that whole section of country, and I have heard that the ranch and house are the finest in the state. You met young John Brewster at the College Prom and you can tell what you think of *him*."

"Ye-es, young Brewster is all right. Every one seemed to think he is exceptionally nice," remarked Barbara.

Mrs. Maynard sighed with relief as she felt that a weight had been lifted from her mind. She was anxious to have her two daughters climb the social ladder to a higher plane than she had been able to reach, so she knew they must be careful to associate with only those who had already arrived there through forbears or ambition.

"Then we can wire Anne at once to complete arrangements, Frederick?" ventured the lady, watching her husband's expression.

"I'll attend to that but when can you be ready to go?" asked Mr. Maynard, glancing from one to the other of the trio.

"The same day you start, Daddy!" declared Eleanor, giving her father a hug.

"Why, we simply can't, Nolla! Father leaves Chicago next week and we have *so* much to prepare before going to a place where we are apt to meet the very élite of society," cried Barbara.

"It will take fully two weeks to go through the girls' wardrobe, Frederick, and see that everything is the last word," added Mrs. Maynard, explanatory of her eldest daughter's dismay.

"Well, fix things up any way you say, but I'm off for the bank when you begin talking dress," laughed Mr. Maynard.

"Now, Frederick, don't leave us like this! You know we will need money to fit out the girls, and then you *must* have some idea of when Anne can expect them in Denver," hurriedly said Mrs. Maynard as her husband crossed the room to leave.

"Daddy, I don't want another thing to wear; I've got so many things now that it makes me tired to keep changing to suit the thousand and one occasions," declared Eleanor, running after her father to kiss him good-by.

"Nolla! I declare you will never grow up!

Pray *walk* like a lady when you cross a room, won't you?" complained Barbara.

Eleanor smiled up at her father and he pinched her thin cheek as he stooped to kiss her. Then he waved his hand at the others and left the room. Once outside the door and safely out of hearing he chuckled to himself.

"Bob pictures a gay resort with troops of male admirers to play tennis and dance away the hours with. She is thinking of dress to captivate her 'moths,' but Nolla is thinking of the rural pleasures she has heard me describe to her. If Bob knew the truth, she'd never go, and poor little Nolla would lose the most wonderful opportunity of her young life. I'd best not prejudice Bob or mother, but just pay the bills for finery and whims and bide my time."

Soon after arriving at his bank-office he sent a message to Anne Stewart at Denver, advising her to engage the rooms at the Brewster home. As an afterthought, he added that he was anxious to have Eleanor get away about the time he left home for his trip.

That afternoon he carried home the reply from Anne Stewart: "Have engaged rooms and board from next week on. Wire when to expect you at Denver. Anne."

Mrs. Maynard had heard from her friends that day that their plans were changed and now they expected to leave Chicago sooner than she had thought. This made her agree quickly to having her daughters start the following week.

"But, mother, it can't be done. I need a riding habit, and tennis clothes, and a few new afternoon gowns and evening dresses!" remonstrated Barbara.

"You had a new habit last fall, Bob," Eleanor said.

"But it has a long coat and full bloomers. No one is wearing that style, now. Everything is mannish coats and tight knickerbockers," argued Barbara.

"I will call up the tailor at once, girls, and have him give us the preference over other work," Mrs. Maynard replied.

"Not for me! I don't like the tight habits. I shall take my bloomer one," replied Eleanor, decidedly.

"Dear me, Nolla! You don't seem to care a fig about your appearance. What will become of you when it is time for you to make your début?" sighed Mrs. Maynard, despondently.

"I'm not going to do anything so silly—I'm going into business when I grow up!"

"Oh!"

"Nolla!"

Mother and sister could hardly gasp the words as they turned shocked eyes in the direction of Mr. Maynard who had been writing out checks for his family. He leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily at the independence of his youngest child.

"Frederick! Now you see what comes of your petting Nolla whenever she says or does anything dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard.

"Is business so dreadful, then? Anne Stewart seems all right, and she is earning her living," ventured Eleanor.

"I wash my hands of you, after this, Eleanor! If you do anything so unheard of as you threaten, no one will keep up with you," declared Barbara, sternly.

"They'll have to travel mighty fast to keep up with me, Bob, once I am of age and start in business," laughed Eleanor.

"That will do, young lady! Remember you are only fourteen, and business is a long time off for you!" Mrs. Maynard remarked.

Then Eleanor hung over the back of her father's chair twisting the iron-gray hair into ridiculous points while her mother and Barbara

forgot her presence and planned many fetching gowns for the summer campaign. Both were fair examples of modern society and its aims, and they sacrificed many worth-while plans and pleasures upon the altar of their fickle goddess.

So it followed that the fashionable tailors, the modiste and the lingerie-maker stitched and fitted and clipped, on beautiful materials and trimmings, until everything was ready for Barbara's summer victory. Eleanor steadfastly refused to be annoyed by having new clothes made, so her trunk was packed with the wardrobe she already had on hand.

"Of course, Nolla's appearance is not of as much consequence as yours, Bob, as she still is so young and delicate. It is different with you, however, and I'm so glad you are sensible to appreciate what a difference clothes make," said Mrs. Maynard, resignedly, as the seven trunks were packed and waiting for the expressman.

"I'm glad your fussing is over at last. If you had much more to sew and fit we never *would* get away!" grumbled Eleanor, watching the man stagger as he carried the heavy trunks downstairs.

"Well, I'll soon be reaping the benefit of my patience and *you'll* be sorry you were so indifferent over your looks," retorted Barbara, turning away

from the window once her five trunks were safely on the express wagon.

"Girls, you're sure everything that Celeste wrote down on the list is packed? Your complexion cream in case of freckles or tan—and the shampoo mixture for the hair-dresser to use? Tell him I never allow you to use ready-made preparations on your hair."

"Yes, mother, all the toilet articles are in the small trunk, and the few extra things were packed in Eleanor's trunk because she had a corner with nothing to fill in it," explained Barbara.

"Thank goodness we can eat dinner and go to bed to-night without being served styles and fits!" sighed Eleanor, not meaning to be irreverent at her mother's gospel.

Anne Stewart had not mentioned the need of mountain-shoes and good plain clothing in her letters to the Maynards, because Mr. Maynard particularly requested her to delete such items. Anne was bright at reading minds and smiled as she surmised the reason for the restriction. She knew Eleanor would glory in old clothes and a good time, but would *Barbara* be so willing to visit Pebbly Pit farm if she knew the truth about the environment?

Anne's single steamer trunk was filled with sen-

sible clothes and the toilet articles she knew she would need for the summer. Then she wired the Maynards to say all was waiting to hear from them. And Barbara wired back that they would meet her at the Denver Terminal Station at the day and time agreed upon.

Meantime, great preparations were under way at Pebbly Pit. John's room had to be cleaned and rearranged for the young ladies. While Polly and her mother planned the work, Mr. Brewster made a thorough search of the country-side in hopes of finding a suitable maid-servant for his wife and Polly.

Most ranchers need their daughters at home, and as there are no really poor or poverty-stricken families in those farming sections, the task of finding a servant was not an easy one. And Mr. Brewster realized what it meant, when he read in the papers how difficult a problem it was becoming—this servant-girl question!

At last, as he was about to despair of ever finding any one, he stopped in at the Oak Creek Post Office to see if there was any mail. Here he met a rancher-friend from the Yellow Jacket Pass region.

"How-thar, Sam!" called Jim Sattler, heartily.

"How-do yourself, Jim!" returned Mr. Brew-

ster, catching hold of Jim's hardened hand and shaking it back and forth.

"You-all air a sight for sore eyes, Sam! Hain't seen hide nor hair of any one of you for nigh onto a year! Be'n keepin' pritty busy, Sam?" said Jim, in a voice that rolled forth like deep thunder.

"Mighty busy, Jim! John's away to college, you know, and now my leetle chick thinks she can scratch for herself, too. She's bound to go to school, in Denver, this coming fall."

"Sam, nuthin' like it, these days! A man or woman has to have eddication to rassle with livin'! Let her go to it, says Ah! It won't be long afore my boys'll be goin' away, too!"

"That's what brings me here to-day. Ah have been hunting for some kind of a gal to help the missus this summer and to have her broken in by the time Polly leaves home," explained Sam Brewster.

"Git one?"

"Not yet! It seems they're as scarce as hen's teeth. Ah never dreamed it would be such a job to hunt one up, or Ah doubt if Ah'd have consented to have those girls come and summer with us."

"See har, Sam! Ah bet Ah knows just the woman for you-all, ef you-all ain't lookin' for a

young gal with a figger like a wisp of hay."

"Polly's wisp enough for one ranch! So Ah'm not looking for style but stock. Do you-all know one, Jim?"

"Ah do that! Sary Dodd's her name. You know Bill Dodd, don't yuh—he never 'mounted to much as a rancher."

"Seems to me Ah do! The name's familiar, anyway. Did he come from Yellow Jacket Pass way?" asked Mr. Brewster, scratching his neck, thoughtfully.

"The same! Wall, he died an' left Sary with nothing but funeral costs. She had to sell that measly ranch that Bill held a quarter interest in to pay bills, and now she hain't got nawthin' but her health. Better see Sary, Sam."

It was the dawn of hope for Mr. Brewster. Since starting on his self-appointed search, he had been growing more and more despondent of success. Now he urged his horse towards Yellow Jacket Pass to find Sary Dodd.

After seeking at various ranches for the elusive Sary, he located her. But she was not elusive looking. She was six feet in height and would tip the scales easily at two hundred pounds.

"Are you widow Dodd? Jim Sattler sent

me to see if you-all would like a place to live out? We-all have company for the summer and my wife needs help," explained Sam Brewster.

Sary beamed and exchanged polite introductions. "You-all tuk me clar off my feet, Mr. Brewster. Yes, Ah did think some of goin' in a reel good fam'ly to wuk, but nawthin' come up fer me, so Ah'm visitin' the neighbors. Do you-all want me immijit?"

The rancher saw that Sary was over-anxious to accept his offer of a place, but he was not the man to take advantage of her in financial matters. So he replied:

"Ah s'pose we ought to fix the wage, but Mrs. Brewster wants some one at once, and you-all can settle salary when you-all get there."

"Ah've heerd tell what a square man you-all was, Mr. Brewster, an' now Ah knows it!" Suspicious moisture filled Sary's eyes as she spoke.

"Ah've won a way by being honest in all my dealings, for it pays in the end. But tell me—can you come along?"

"Ef you-all kin wait, Ah'll tie up my bundle in a minit!" agreed Sary, anxiously.

"All right! But don't waste any time packing your ball-gowns, Sary," laughed Mr. Brew-

ster, facetiously, as the load of trouble rolled from his heart.

Sary was soon perched beside the rancher on the high spring seat of the lumbering ranch-wagon, tenderly holding a half-dead rubber plant. On that drive, her host heard more of every family history of the ranchers for miles around than he had ever dreamed of knowing even if he lived to be a hundred.

Sary Dodd arrived at the ranch-house the day before the visitors were expected. Mrs. Brewster and Polly were in the midst of a light housecleaning as the strangers must not find a speck of dust anywhere!

"Maw, here's Sary Dodd! Ah got her to help!" shouted Sam Brewster, pulling up his horse by the side of the porch.

"Sary Dodd! Oh, Sary, I'm right glad to see you! Come in, won't you?" greeted Mrs. Brewster, coming to the door.

"Just in time, Mrs. Dodd, to help me shove this press in to the spare room," added Polly, arresting her work to smile at the new-comer.

"Give Sary time to lay off her bonnet, child!" reproved Mrs. Brewster, pulling out a rocker for the widow.

"Laws me! What'cher doin'—a-cleanin' house

agin!" cried Sary, leaning against the door-frame panting for breath.

"Winded, Sary? Ah told you-all Ah'd carry that heavy box from the wagon. But no!" exclaimed Mr. Brewster.

Polly was over by the door by this time, and she stooped to carry the box indoors.

"Goodness! What's in the box to make it so heavy?"

"Chil', that box hol's all my treasures on arth! Some few things Bill lef' me, our fam'ly album, an' my gran'mother's pieces of reel silver—four plated! And mos' of all, the Brittania cake basket Bill gave me on our annerversary!" explained Sary, pathetically, as she dabbed a black cotton glove at her dewy eyes.

"Sam, take the team to the barn and leave Sary with us. We'll soon have her feeling at home," said Mrs. Brewster, seeing a frown coming over her lord and master's face, as he wondered if his home-life was to be shadowed by a sorrowing widow!

The moment Mr. Brewster left for the barn, his wife returned to the "help," who had plumped herself down into the wooden Boston rocker and was fanning herself vigorously with a newspaper.

"Let me remove your bonnet, Sary," offered Mrs. Brewster kindly, taking the twisted black strings to undo the knot that was tightly tied under a heavy double chin.

"Ah declar t' goodness, Miss Brewster, ef you-all hain't too good! Ah'll jest set t' git my second wind, an' then Ah'll tek right hol' of things!" gasped Sary.

"Don't hurry yourself. Just cool off and then you'll feel better after such a long ride. Shall I send Polly to the spring-house for some cold milk?" asked the lady of the house, folding the flimsy crêpe token of Sary's state of widowhood.

"G'wan now, Miss Brewster—I'm no infant!" scoffed Sary. "Don' cher know a fat bein' mustn't tech milk 'cause it's more fattenin'?"

The hostess refrained from giving her opinion, but she busied herself with unpinning the rusty black plush cape that the widow had donned when she began her journey to new surroundings. Being quite rested by this time, Sary gripped a hold on each arm of the rocker and managed to hoist her bulky form out from the too close embrace of the senseless wooden arms.

"Now ef Polly er you-all 'll show me whar to

bunk, Ah ricken Ah'll change my Sunday-best an' pitch inter work," said the willing help.

"Polly, you drag the box in while I show Sary her room," called Mrs. Brewster, coming to the door that opened from the living-room directly into John's chamber—now to be a guest room.

CHAPTER IV

THE "SERVANT PROBLEM" SOLVED

In the wild mountain regions of the Rockies, where maids are unheard of, and the "hotels" provide the most primitive service, the house-wives have little concern over the perplexing question of "help" as experienced in large cities.

If it is necessary to assist a neighbor who is marrying off a daughter and wants to provide her with a trousseau, a sewing-bee is arranged and ranchers' families for miles around drive in and visit. Quilts, sheets, and other necessities are quickly stitched and neatly folded out of the way by the women, while the men occupy themselves with work about the place until it is time for the grand dinner.

The same neighborly help is offered in other emergencies, so that few families want servants. At the same time, help has not been looked down upon as menial work by the ranchers, and so the "help" lives as a member of the family that happens to secure one.

In cases such as Sary Dodd's, where a woman is left penniless and another woman needs her practical aid, the two meet half-way and the kitchen atmosphere is serene. Quite different is the case in cities, however.

Sary felt she was the social equal to any rancher's wife, for had she not been mistress of a ranch, too—even though it was never paid for. So she felt she was doing the Brewsters a favor by sharing their home and work, even while she admitted the obligation she was under of being provided with bed and board.

The tiny room allotted to the widow was directly back of the kitchen L. It had a single window that gave a fine view of Rainbow Cliffs, but the furniture was of the plainest. Sary took in the simplicity in one glance and then turned to her mistress.

"Ah've hear'n tell how Sam Brewster kin buy er sell th' hull township, ef he likes, Miss Brewster," ventured Sary, slyly.

But the mistress had heard of Sary's proneness to gossip and so replied: "We don't consider wealth worth anything unless you know what to do with it. We live as comfortably as we like, and try to use what is left in helping others."

Sary made no reply to this statement, but

watched Mrs. Brewster go to the window and pull on the cord that was stretched at one side of the window-frame. Instantly, the decorated window-shade pulleyed up to allow more light to shine into the room.

"Now Ah see how that wu'ks!" cried Sary, delightedly.

Mrs. Brewster turned with a questioning look in her eyes.

Sary explained. "Cal Lorrimer tol' me like-es-how them winder shades wu'ked but Ah jest coulden' see it."

Mrs. Brewster laughed and Sary ventured to pulley the shade herself. She drew it up and down several times and then turned to express her sentiments to her mistress.

"My, but yuh're ferchunit t' have all sech new-fangled idees in the house! It clean locoes me t' think Ah'm livin' wid sech fine contraptions." And Sary pressed her large freckled hands over her sparse red hair to signify how "locoed" her brain really was.

Mrs. Brewster laughed merrily. "Why, Sary, since I left Denver, my friends all have shades in the windows that run up and down on springs without any other help. They go by themselves."

"Now, Miss Brewster! Do *you* believe that fairy-tale?" quizzed Sary, looking keenly at her mistress to see if she was trying to laugh at her ignorance of city-life.

"It is a fact, Sary—not a fairy-tale. My friend has them all through her house, and I expect to replace these pulleys with spring rollers, some day."

Sary passed her hand over the lustra design on the shade and Mrs. Brewster turned to leave the room. Before she closed the door, she said: "I'm going to start dinner, Sary. When you are ready you can join me in the kitchen."

The moment the mistress was gone, Sary ran to make sure the door was securely closed. Then she turned to inspect the belongings of the room.

"Huh! the press ain't so much—plain deal painted brown."

The press was passed by the scornful occupant of the room, and the bed next came under her appraising eye.

"Th' bed's soft wood, too, but it feels comfertible."

Sary sat on the bed and bounced up and down to test the springs and mattress before she pulled back the covers to examine the quality of filling in the ticking.

"Laws! It hain't corn-husks, a-tall! It's soft as down!"

Inborn curiosity compelled her to take a hairpin and rip open a bit of the seam. To her amazement she pulled out a tangle of long whitish hair.

"Of all things! And *this* is what I hev to sleep on!" ejaculated the insulted maid. "Wall, we'll see about that!"

The sheets and newly patched quilt were designated as "ornery" but the printed spread, patterned to imitate blue torchon lace, drew a murmur of admiration from the woman.

Sary quickly changed her robe of mourning to a calico house-dress and went out, determined to speak her mind about that awful mattress! She never thought such a rich man's house would have so common a thing as "combin's"—even if it was in the "help's" tick!

But the wonderful odor of boiling cabbage made her forget her complaint for the time being. She went to the stove and lifted a lid from the large kettle. She sniffed audibly.

"Um! Ah loves cabbige soup, Miss Brewster!"

"Do you, Sary—so does Mr. Brewster. If

you will watch the meat frying, I will blow the horn to call the men to dinner."

Mrs. Brewster waited until Sary began thickening the gravy, then she took the horn and stood upon the door-step, blowing it several times. It was then hung back of the kitchen door again.

"Polly! Come now, dear, and wash up for dinner," called Mrs. Brewster, standing in the doorway that led to the family living-room.

Presently, the family, augmented by Sary, sat down in the kitchen for dinner. Jeb, the hired man, had followed in after his master, and had been introduced to the new help; he now watched her capable hands and arms as she swung the soup-kettle from the stove.

"Just a moment, Sary!" whispered Mrs. Brewster, warningly.

Sary looked around in surprise and saw the others with bowed heads, waiting for her to get rid of the pot and fold her hands. It took her but half a second to understand and follow the leading.

The ranchers of the Rocky Mountains and plains are most orthodox church folk. They would as soon steal or murder as to miss "meetin'," or work on a Sunday. And most of

them have regular family prayers and long services at home whenever opportunity offers.

Sam Brewster was not one of the latter kind but the longer the grace he said, the better a man he thought he was. In every other way, so liberal and kind, it was not consistent for him to act so narrow-minded regarding religion.

Once the grace was said, the host unfolded his napkin and looked to Sary for the soup. The soup-pot had been taken up the second time and was about to be placed in the middle of the table where every one could serve themselves as they wished, but Mrs. Brewster gave her a look and sign that was incomprehensible. She was confused for once in her life.

"I'll serve the soup this noon, Sary, and you can pass the plates," remarked Mrs. Brewster, seeing her maid did not understand.

And now Sary beheld a new order of things! Soup that was dipped into plates and passed until each member at table had a dish before him. Large white napkins that were not tied about the neck but spread over the lap! How funny it seemed that the small red-flowered squares Sary had been accustomed to when company came were nowhere in evidence.

As the meal progressed, Sary's wonderment

increased; she failed to hear familiar sounds of eating, nor saw the usual form of plying knife and fork together.

Immediately after dinner, Polly led her mother to John's room. "Maw, I'm going to use those new shades I bought for your Christmas gift, and put them at the windows of the girls' room."

"Oh, Polly, don't you think plain white ones will look nicer?" quickly replied Mrs. Brewster, as she beheld the pea-green Holland decorated with monster bronze roses and huge butterflies.

Polly felt disconcerted for the moment as she realized that her mother's tone implied disapproval of the change. But she would not admit that possibly the white would improve the bed-room.

"Why, Maw, you know how much I paid for those shades last Christmas. The man in Oak Creek said they were the grandest ones in Denver!"

"Maybe *he* thought so, Polly, but we must remember that his taste in art has lacked cultivation. Now I prefer pure white shades, or curtains, for a bed-room window," said wise Mrs. Brewster, leaving her daughter to wonder whether she liked pure white for the living-room, also.

But Polly had enough human will and stub-

bornness in her make-up to resist the suggestion offered by her experienced mother. "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do, Maw: I'll just put these lovely shades up till after the girls see them, then we'll change to white. I think it will be best to keep these new and clean for the front room, but I want the city girls to *know* we've got such expensive things in the house."

"Polly dear, that is foolish. I have always tried to teach you otherwise. What matters it, whether you display gorgeous 'feathers' if the thing be false? Simplicity and wisdom are the rarest adornments of a home."

"There you go again, Maw, lecturing me with your wise old saws," laughed Polly, jumping upon the chair to fit the shades in place.

Mrs. Brewster smiled but said nothing. She knew how soon her child would learn good from bad, once she came in contact with strangers. And so well had the mother grounded her daughter that she had no qualms about the result of any contacts.

Mrs. Brewster watched while Polly finished the placing of the dreadful shades, then she looked about at the colored prints tacked upon every available spot of rough plaster-walls. Her brow puckered at the conglomeration of subjects and

sizes of the chromos, but she knew how carefully Polly had saved every one of them that had arrived with tea or soap, so she passed no audible judgment.

"Oh, Maw! I have another great idea!" cried Polly, jumping from the chair and clapping her hands.

"Yes?"

"Let's move Daddy's sofa into the bedroom and place it at the foot of the bed, just like the pictures in the *Farm Journal* show us! Then we won't have to have the single bed brought in from the barn—Anne can sleep on the bed-lounge."

"I really think Anne Stewart will prefer a bed, Polly, even if it is small," gasped Mrs. Brewster hastily.

"Then we'll change later. It won't take a minute to move the sofa in and it will look so citified to the girls who most likely have divans or sofas in their bedrooms at home."

"I think they will like the difference—not having their country bedroom look like the city one. A complete change always is better than a similar environment, especially if the city rooms are more artistically furnished than the result of *our* efforts."

"Now, Maw, don't you want me to surprise

them with the sofa John gave Paw and you, long ago? I'm sure they won't hurt it," coaxed Polly.

"Oh, I'm not thinking of any damage. I was wondering how Anne would like to sleep on a folding sofa instead of in a bed."

"She won't mind; and she'll be glad to see her friends impressed by the bedroom furniture," quickly explained Polly.

"Well, then, call Sary to help you shove it in, while I go and find those braided mats we made last winter," said Mrs. Brewster in a tone of resignation.

Polly needed no second consent, but ran out to call Sary. The sofa was soon wheeled from the chimney-nook into the bedroom which adjoined the living-room at the back. Once it was placed at the foot of the heavy walnut bed, Polly whipped off the cretonne covering that always hid the hideous plush-carpet upholstery.

As the slip-cover came off and revealed the red and green and purple design, Polly glanced at Sary to see the effect made.

"Oh, laws! Ah never see'd sech a sofy! Ain't it grand?" breathed Sary, lost in admiration.

"Sary, it opens, too!" announced Polly, con-

descendingly pulling at the strap that moved the spring to turn the half into a low bed.

"Well, suhs! What next? Yoh Paw must be a milyonaire, shore!"

"No, Sary; John saved his money for selling chickens and a calf, and got this for Paw and Maw, when he went to high school in Denver. Oh, we had an awful time carting it from Oak Creek to Pebbly Pit through all the snow and weather!" explained Polly.

Mrs. Brewster laughed at the remembrance but told Polly that she hoped she would keep the cover on the sofa.

"You don't mean me to cover up the velvet, do you?" asked Polly, aghast at the suggestion.

"Perhaps Anne will sleep better if the flowers are out of sight," remarked Mrs. Brewster, softly, but with amused sarcasm.

"You-all mought better do that, Miss Pollee, cuz them colors will git sun-streaked in this bright light," added Sary.

"I am not worrying about the fade, Sary, but over the fact that the young teacher and her friends will think we *prefer* such crude articles of furniture, instead of tolerating them just because my dear children denied themselves to give us pleasure. It is their motive and delight that we

all felt in the gifts, more than the objects which showed immature judgment," explained Mrs. Brewster, slowly and thoughtfully.

Polly was silenced and she suddenly realized how far she must climb before she knew as much as her mother—even though she studied "Art Notes" in the monthly magazines that reached the ranch.

"I wonder if the harsh color Maw speaks of is the real cause of that cretonne cover always being over the sofa?" wondered the girl to herself. But she said nothing and the sofa was left at the foot of the great bed.

Mrs. Brewster knew she had said much, so she left the room and beckoned Sary to follow her to the kitchen. Polly silently proceeded with the finishing touches to the room.

She hung a painted-framed mirror over the wash-stand. The glass was greenish in hue and wavy in lines, but it looked like a reflector and so it remained in position. An enameled basin and earthen jug did duty for toilet purposes. The plain deal chairs were decorated with crocheted tidies—one tied to the back of each chair. And last, but not least, came the treasure of the Brewster family. It had been preserved in paper wrap-

pings and lavender for many years, and now and then the mistress of the ranch-house removed it and hung it out to keep the folds from turning yellow.

"There now! When they see this knitted cotton spread with its raised roses and lilies, those girls will know that we can have wonderful things here as well as there."

So saying, Polly spread out the thick white quilt until the large double-bed was smoothly covered. Then she stood back and sighed with gratification at the result of her afternoon's work.

"There now! I'll just call Maw before I close up the room," murmured Polly, skipping away to look for Mrs. Brewster.

Sary followed closely after the mistress, as Polly led the triumphal march to the guest-chamber. The door was flung open and the ladies asked to admire.

"Polly, something told me that you would get the spread out of the chest," declared Mrs. Brewster, patting her daughter gently. "And your god-mother would be so pleased if she were here to see how you honored her work. Some day, these quaint old-fashioned spreads and patch-work quilts will become quite the rage again, and then

you will feel proud to show yours. I think Anne will appreciate the endless task such a spread represents."

And once more Polly felt that she had not expressed her interior decorating ideals on the same high plane her mother seemed to have reached, but she would not admit having made a mistake, so the crocheted spread remained, even as the green shades and the gay sofa remained, to welcome the city girls to Pebbly Pit.

CHAPTER V

UNPLEASANT SURPRISES

THE time set for the meeting of the Maynard girls and Anne Stewart at the Denver Terminal Station came and passed with no sign of the Chicago travelers. Then Mrs. Stewart was seen hurrying down the platform waving a yellow envelope to attract her daughter's attention.

Anne was patiently seated on the edge of a truck looking keenly at every one in sight, so she soon saw her mother. The Oak Creek local, that left Denver daily at noon, was getting up enough steam to enable it to make a *regular* start. Whether it would arrive was a question!

Anne hastily tore the telegram open and read it aloud. "Missed train. Don't wait for us. Go on and send machine to meet us to-morrow, same train, at Oak Creek. Explain to Brewsters. Bob."

Anne looked at her mother and laughed. "If that isn't Bob all over! Guess her hair wasn't dressed."

"Do they think the Brewsters run a limousine, or do they mean a sewing-machine?" asked Mrs. Stewart, guilelessly.

Anne laughed again at her mother's innocent expression, but Mrs. Stewart added: "I told you no good would come of transplanting hot-house flowers to an old-fashioned roundel."

"I can picture Bob Maynard hiking from Oak Creek Station to Pebbly Pit—most likely she will wear French heeled shoes!" said Anne, and she laughed so merrily that waiting passengers in the dingy cars glanced from the tiny windows and felt better for the contagious laughter.

"Oh, my dear! You won't think of making those city girls start training with such a hard lesson, will you?" cried Mrs. Stewart, who understood the reason Mr. Maynard had for this outing.

"Bless your dear heart, no! I'll send the wagon for them, but I wondered what would happen in case they *had* to walk!"

"Well, I'm thankful I'm not in Mr. Maynard's shoes when those girls find out what they will have to do *without* all summer."

"Nolla will be in her glory—" began Anne, when the conductor hurried over to the two women.

"Going by this train, ladies?"

"Good-by, mother. I'll write all about the reception," laughed Anne, hurriedly kissing her mother and giving her a hug.

"All aboard!" shouted the brakeman, as the tardy passenger mounted the steep steps and waved her hand at Mrs. Stewart.

It was a ride of about seventy miles and Anne thoroughly enjoyed reviewing every landmark as she passed it by. Jeb stood waiting at the little station of Oak Creek, his mouth and eyes wide open as he watched the train pull in—always an exciting time for the farmhand.

The cumbersome ranch-wagon, with its high spring-seat, was drawn up beside a telegraph pole to which the skittish young horses had been securely tied. Anne went over to meet Jeb, and said, with a smile:

"Were you waiting for some ladies for the Brewsters? I am Anne Stewart, the teacher who used to be at Bear Forks school."

"Ya-as'm! How-dee! Hain't you-all got unny more comin'?"

"Not to-day. They missed their train and expect to be here on to-morrow's noon-train. What is your name, may I ask?"

"Jeb," laconically replied the man, looking

about as if he still missed a necessary item for the return trip.

"Oh! I guess you want my baggage. It's that small trunk over by the box-car," explained Anne, and Jeb grinned with relief.

As he carried the trunk lightly as if it were a stick, Anne remarked: "It's too bad to make you take this trip again to-morrow."

"Not so-es you-all kin notice it! To-morrer is pay-day fer the miners, en Oak Crick is a lively town, them times," explained Jeb, winking an eye to show what fun he expected to have next day.

"Then it's a lucky thing for you, Jeb, that my friends missed the train to-day."

"Jes' so!" chuckled Jeb, as he gathered up the reins and snacked the whip over his horses' heads.

Conversation lagged after the start, for the bumping and rumbling of the heavy wagon as it went over rocks and ruts in the rough trail, forced all the breath from the passenger's lungs.

The wagon drew up beside the porch of the ranch-house and Anne found the family waiting to receive them. She jumped from her perch and greeted Polly, then smiled at Mr. and Mrs. Brewster as the girl introduced her. Even Sary felt flattered at the kindly greeting accorded her by this pretty school-teacher.

"Wh-hy—you are all alone!" gasped Polly.

Then Anne explained about the telegram just as her train was about to leave Denver. The looks of blank surprise changed to relief as the family heard the cause of the other two girls' non-appearance. They all entered the house together, delighted with each other. Mrs. Brewster felt that she was going to like this girl.

Anne was delighted with the place and everything in connection with it. Even the intense coloring of the sofa or the pea-green shades failed to disturb her peace and repose that night.

After the supper dishes had been cleared away, Mrs. Brewster led the way to the wide terrace that stretched from the porch to the descent of the crater. Here the group watched the sunset, and became better acquainted. By bedtime, Mrs. Brewster was of the opinion that any man excepting John, who got Anne Stewart for a wife was very fortunate, indeed! John was still a superior being.

The next morning, at breakfast, Mr. Brewster said to Jeb: "Ah have to look after some business in Oak Creek, to-day, Jeb, so you need not drive over for the girls. Ah will stop at the station and look them up."

"Mebbe you-all'd better take me to hist the

trunks, es Ah am young and hearty," ventured Jeb, anxiously.

"You! Why, Jeb, Ah can turn you over with my small finger," laughed Mr. Brewster, comparing his tall muscular frame with that of small slim Jeb's.

So Jeb slouched away to look after his master's farm work as well as his own, and as he worked he grumbled and thought of the fun and frolics the "fellers" in Oak Creek were having on their pay-day.

At the Denver station, two girls dressed in the latest modes, walked along the platform toward a line of railway coaches.

"What dirty-looking cars. Can these be right?" said Barbara Maynard.

And the younger girl, Eleanor, replied: "I suppose they burn soft coal."

"Well, they shouldn't! Everything we have on will be covered with soot before we reach the town."

"That will mean more business for the dry-cleaners at Oak Creek," laughed Eleanor. Had she known that the place could not boast of any kind of a cleaning establishment, she would have laughed louder and longer at the novelty.

"I suppose this Oak Creek is the shopping cen-

ter for all the smaller villages that are within motoring distance of it," surmised Barbara.

"I suppose so," agreed Eleanor, as she watched a man oil the wheels under the engine.

The man finished the work and straightened up. His face and hands were black from grease and oil and soot, but he smiled a friendly smile at the young ladies who were obviously waiting to board his train.

"She's all made up, leddies, ef you-all wants to git in."

"Mercy! Does he have to grin as if he were an old friend when he announces the fact?" complained Barbara, daintily picking her way between boxes and bags of freight.

"He's a genuine western type," laughed Eleanor, following her sister into the coach.

"Goodness gracious! Are we expected to sit on these old dusty plush seats?" cried Barbara, whipping the upholstery with her tiny handkerchief before she seated herself.

Again Eleanor laughed but she was not as merry as when she jumped from the Pullman that morning.

Quite different were the sensations of the two city girls, to those of Anne Stewart, as they passed over the same route and saw the same country.

Perhaps it was the difference in training more than the ideals of the three girls.

"Nolla, can all the houses be as horrid as those we have passed by?" asked Barbara, nodding at a group of log-houses.

"I don't know, but they certainly are smaller than the homes in Chicago, aren't they?" rejoined Eleanor, gazing in open curiosity at the scenery and buildings so different from that of the city.

"Smaller! Why, they are simply *poverty*-stricken in looks!" exclaimed Barbara in disgust.

The nearer the train came to Oak Creek, the smaller and rougher the houses seemed, until the guard called out:

"Oak Crick! Here's your station!"

The girls gazed at each other in consternation, for the place was little more than a rough mining settlement, or ranch-town.

The brakeman caught up the leather bags and jumped from the slowing train. He planked them down regardless of contents, and ran off to the station. It was an old discarded box-car shoved on a siding to do duty as ticket-office and freight station.

The girls hurried out to the car platform and Barbara asked: "Nolla, why don't you call the porter?"

"They never had one on this line!" Then stepping down side-ways from the high narrow steps of the train, Eleanor cried:

"Gracious! Do catch me if I fall!"

Barbara stared about as a frozen horror slowly crept into her soul and was expressed in her eyes. "Was *this* the lovely mountain resort for which she had planned such conquests?"

Eleanor spied the precious bags too close to the tracks to insure their safety, so she rushed over to save them from disaster—for who could tell whether that shaky old train would hold together much longer!

But the Local looked worse than it really was. It was as reliable a set of old cars as could be found, even if the paint and polish had vanished with age. Just as the bags were recovered, the whistle tooted, the wheels grated in turning, and the train that on its return trip to Denvèr, might have carried these girls back to *their* kind of civilization, slowly pulled out of sight.

Eleanor struggled with the two well-filled bags of toilet accessories, and deposited them before her sister. "Bet you everything is broken, and our house-dresses ruined with perfume!"

As Barbara made no reply, Eleanor followed the direction of her stare. A group of dreadful

looking miners and a crowd of wild-looking cow-punchers were using seven expensive wardrobe trunks for their pleasure.

Evidently the men had indulged in too many tests of Oak Creek whiskey, called "Pizen" by the natives. The cow-boys were picturesque enough in their wide sombreros, woolly chaps, gay shirts, and a swagger that matched their trick of shooting. The miners were swarthy, bearded foreigners, who wore long boots, loose shirts, and belts from which ugly-looking six-shooters protruded.

As Eleanor decided to go over to the circle surrounding the trunks, and demand an explanation she heard a hardened miner shout: "It's my deal next!"

Then the sisters saw that their largest trunk had been turned over on its side to make a convenient card-table. The others accommodated the players and loungers whose spurred heels beat a tattoo upon the polished grain-leather covers.

"Humph! At least we can display original etchings on our trunks when we get them back home," remarked Eleanor, with a gleam of amusement at the affair.

"Everything will simply be ruined! Just see that trunk holding my evening-dresses—right by that horse-trough. Do make those awful crea-

tures go away, won't you, Nolla?" begged Barbara.

"With those nasty guns sticking from their belts —not me! But I'll go to the office and complain to the baggage-master."

So Eleanor courageously turned her back on the fascinating sight of all those revolvers, and Barbara followed closely at her sister's heels; both of them hurried to the old car that displayed a sign saying it was the baggage-room. No one was there, so the girls stood at the door, whence the road leading to the railway could be seen.

"If only we knew when the chauffeur would come!" sighed Barbara, but now Eleanor had misgivings about an automobile.

Meantime the men had seen the two strangers hovering about but they were not aware that the trunks belonged to the new-comers. When the girls entered the "station" one old rascal leaned over and said:

"Them are tenderfeet an' we-all oughter welcome 'em in th' good old-fashioned custom."

"Sure thing!" cried the others, and they quickly planned.

Eleanor decided it was time to dispossess these ruffians from her property, so she assumed an air

of courage and started for the group, while Barbara held firmly to her sister's sleeve.

But an unexpected dénouement halted the two girls.

"Ah say you cheated that deal!" howled a miner, at the same time he slapped his leather gauntlet across a cow-boy's face.

Instantly every revolver was whipped forth and a terrible fight ensued, every man taking part in the general mêlée. The girls, trembling with fear as shots and curses rang out profusely, clung to each other helplessly, but failed to note that the guns were aimed skyward.

"Hey, boys—what the deuce do you-all mean?" shouted a fine-looking man coming upon the scene unannounced.

The crowd of men looked sheepish and hurriedly explained the joke, looking over in the direction of the two strangers. As their welcome was considered a huge joke the men laughed loudly.

Mr. Brewster (for it was the rancher) frowned when he saw the pale girls almost fainting from fear. Then he turned to the ringleader in the plot:

"Say, Bill! Was that pesky train from Den-

ver on time—or too soon, for a change?" asked Mr. Brewster, consulting his watch.

"It war ten minits too airly, 'cause Hank Janssen, th' ingineer, 's got a christenin' down to his home to-night," explained Bill.

"Then those two girls are my company," groaned the rancher, causing a scramble at his words. The cow-punchers whipped off their hats to salute and the miners shuffled behind the daring cow-boys, the better to hide their faces from the "Boss."

Mr. Brewster hurried over to reassure the girls that the whole fight had been staged to entertain them. He explained the cause of his not being on hand to meet them, and waving his hand for the cow-boys, he called:

"Get busy, boys! Shake those trunks into the wagon."

While the men eagerly lent shoulders and muscles to the task expected of them, the three principals in this group made personal notes of each other, albeit not a word was said.

"Ah never did see such ridiculous styles as this!" thought Sam Brewster, looking the girls over from top to toe.

"This rough man Mr. Brewster! Why, he's

a common farmer!" thought Barbara, disdainfully.

"I bet Polly's father's a heap of fun!" thought Eleanor.

When Mr. Brewster realized there were *seven* great trunks belonging to two girls, he groaned within himself, wondering what in the world could be found to fill so many!

The men were handed cigars, and as they doffed their hats to say "Thank you-all" they backed away to permit the Boss to help the girls up the high wagon-side.

Barbara looked at the rough stained hands and said insultingly: "No, thank you!"

"Here—let me jump up and pull you in," laughed Eleanor, uncomfortably, seeing that her sister had offended their host.

Sam Brewster turned to give his horses a pail of water while the two girls attempted to climb up. But the small steel foot-rest was too high to be reached without a boost from below, so they had to climb, hand over hand, up the great wheel with its spokes clogged with the heavy mud from the trails.

When they were finally seated, both girls looked at each other. Fresh natty traveling suits were streaked by the mud, and their gloves—soft

chamois-skins—could now be thrown away. Even their faces had been smeared with mud when they slipped and had to clutch at any possible rescue. Naturally, they were not in too amiable a frame of mind for what awaited them at the end of the trip.

The high spring-seat was the only one, so Barbara had to sit there. "I simply cannot hold on to this sky-scraper!" complained she testily.

"It's the only one, Bob, so you will *have* to!" replied Eleanor.

In another moment, Mr. Brewster climbed up easily and sat beside the strangers. He churked to the horses and drove away in a manner that threatened to hurl the city girls from their earthly perch into kingdom come.

"Oh, this is terrible!" groaned Barbara, at an unusually hard bump of the wagon over a rutty road.

"Maybe we can sit down on the floor of the wagon where the trunks are?" ventured Eleanor, looking at Mr. Brewster.

"Shore—if you-all want to. The senseless trunks make better company than a rough old farmer," replied Mr. Brewster, without the least suspicion of malice in the words.

The exchange was made and the girls felt pro-

tected by the trunks, so they could take a livelier interest in the ride. As they left the road leading from Oak Creek, the sight of imposing mountains towering in the distance thrilled them in spite of their determination to dislike everything they saw. And the gorgeous hues and beauty of the strange wild-flowers caused exclamations from Eleanor, while Barbara gasped at the vast herds of cattle, grazing, as they roamed over the plains.

Finally Mr. Brewster guided the horses away from the wide trail, into the Bear Forks trail that wound in and out, now on the brink of the river's chasm, or again between jagged cliffs. Anon the awed girls gazed down into fearful depths as the wagon skirted the dangerous brink, or craned their necks to look at the wonderful vines and foliage hanging from the tops of massive rocks.

By the time they reached the ridge of foot-hills where the trail led off to the cliffs at the Devil's Grave, both sisters were silenced by the impressive scenery, so that petty problems of puny mortals faded into a misty back-ground.

Suddenly the trail turned around a group of great rocks and the first glimpse of Rainbow Cliffs could be seen. As the wagon drew nigh the gorge running through the cliffs, Anne Stewart and Polly were found waiting for the visitors.

Anne introduced Polly, and Eleanor acknowledged the courtesy, but Barbara rudely failed to notice it as she was so obsessed with the desire to complain about the railroad, the natives of Oak Creek, the trails to Pebbly Pit, and everything connected with the coming.

Polly felt dreadfully shy with such unusual-looking girls. Not that their hats had feathers or fine flowers, nor their suits had any expensive trimmings on them, to suggest wealth, but the way they *looked* in their clothes! What made the difference, she wondered. Had Anne told her the actual cost of those hats and suits, poor Polly would have fainted from shock.

Barbara was holding forth on her wrongs. "I can't see for the life of me, Anne, why you selected such an outlandish spot as this, for us, in which to waste a precious summer. Why, it is simply *unbearable*—nothing but mountains and trails in sight! And no one but just farmers to associate with! Oh, oh!"

The accent on "farmers" made Polly wince and Eleanor frown, at the speaker. Anne hastened to change the subject for she feared Mr. Brewster might turn his horses and take them all back to Oak Creek station.

It was a duel of dialogue between Anne and

Barbara after that, each one trying to keep up a conversation they wished to down the other with. Thus the wagon reached the porch.

Polly sprang out and ran indoors unnoticed by any one. Eleanor was deeply interested in gazing out at the great crater bowl that formed the pasture and farm-lands of Pebbly Pit. Anne was anxious to have her charges make a good impression on Mrs. Brewster and so she jumped out and held a hand to assist Barbara.

The lady of the house stood waiting to welcome the girls, when Sary ran out from the kitchen, hurriedly drying her wet hands on an apron. She fully expected to shake hands with the fine ladies, when her turn came to be introduced. She stood directly back of her mistress peering eagerly at the new-comers in their simple straw hats, severe cloth suits, and shoes, gloves, and veils of the finest.

Before Anne Stewart could open her lips to introduce the girls, Barbara sent a scornful glance over the group and then at the ranch-house, and said: "What a barracks! It's nothing more than a log cabin on a gigantic scale."

"Oh, I think it is great! Just like the wonderful cabins we read about in the Adirondacks, or other large camp-sites," quickly added Eleanor.

"But this is not a camp, my poor little sister! And we haven't the same set either, as we would have had at a fashionable camp," sneered Barbara.

"You needn't 'poor me,' Bob! I'm just crazy over the farm and—and everything. Hurry up, Anne, and introduce me so I can get acquainted," cried Eleanor, nudging the teacher to remind her of her duty.

Mr. Brewster had driven the team to a post a little farther up the road, and was not present when the introductions took place. Mrs. Brewster summoned a pleasant smile for Barbara, and a motherly pat on the shoulder for Eleanor. Then Sary stepped forward to be introduced, as it was customary for her to be treated as a member of the family.

"Glad t' know you-all!" simpered Sary, bowing stiffly and offering her reddened hand to shake the gloved ones of the girls.

Barbara completely ignored the par-boiled digits and slightly lifted one eyebrow at Sary. Eleanor felt so humiliated at her sister's actions that she came forward to make amends but Sary would have none of it.

When Barbara gave her a frozen look, Sary examined her hands for a moment, then humped her shoulders and stamped back to the kitchen-

range where she had been boiling soap-fat and straining out the scum before the arrival of the city misses.

"Anne, would your friends like to refresh themselves in the bedroom?" asked Mrs. Brewster to break the embarrassed silence.

"Oh, yes, of course!" replied Anne, anxiously turning to Barbara.

Eleanor took the initiative of going toward the door. "I never saw such a darling bungalow! I just love everything spread out on the ground floor. No stairs and no elevators—Oh, how nice!"

"It is a change from your brown-stone mansions, isn't it?" replied Mrs. Brewster, smiling at the concerned face.

"To me it is the most awful place! I don't suppose you have baths, or electric light, or telephone service?" said Barbara.

"Now you see here, Barbara Maynard! You've got to stop this whimpering or I'll wire Daddy to make you go home! I just won't have my whole summer spoiled by your complaints!" cried Eleanor, angrily, and stamping her foot to emphasize her words.

"I hope you didn't expect me to *stay* here, did you?" demanded Barbara.

"I hope you won't—that's all I've got to say! Come on, Anne, and show me the place. Where's Polly gone?" said Eleanor.

Polly was found in the large living-room, looking the picture of disappointment. Anne understood how she must have felt, so she diverted the attention of the newcomers to the great yawning fire-place that could hold several tree-trunks at one time.

"And do you know, Nolla, every bit of wood in this house was hewn and carted here by Mr. Brewster? You see the government allows settlers just so much timber with which to construct a home and barns. There is a county saw-mill to saw and trim logs and then the owner has to cart them himself. Naturally, one hasn't time to carve fancy *ideals* in the wood one uses for the house. And having it sent from Denver, or other large cities where labor is to be had, is also out of the question. The freight costs, and the long haul from Oak Creek to the Pit presents difficulties not to be overcome. So folks build homes as solid and strong as they can, and leave the trimmings for a future generation." Anne explained all this for Barbara's benefit, and Mrs. Brewster smiled her gratitude to the girl.

Eleanor seemed more impressed than ever after

she heard of the time and labor it must have taken to construct such a house as the Brewster ranch boasted; and Barbara was taken back, as she had not thought of such things, but she pretended not to care.

CHAPTER VI

THE HARROWING DETAILS

"Now, girls, come and see the guest-room Polly prepared for us. You know she is going to study interior decorating when she grows up—aren't you, Polly?" said Anne, placing an arm protectingly about the girl's shoulders and moving towards the chamber.

Polly brightened up at once, for she remembered the sofa that Anne had praised as having made a fine bed, and then there were the gorgeous bronzed shades that darkened the windows!

Polly stood at the head of the sofa watching eagerly for the effect of the decorating on the city visitors. Barbara stared at first in utter unbelief that her room could be so barren of comfort, then she turned and frowned darkly as the truth impressed her.

"Why! There's nothing here—only an old bed, and a painted set of drawers such as our servants would fling out of the room!" Then she

caught a twisted reflection of her face in the green mirror. It was too much!

She threw herself upon the sofa and laughed hysterically. Eleanor wondered at her sister's discordant mirth but when she looked in the direction Barbara's eyes were turned, she saw the cause.

"Verily, Anne, 'pride goeth before a fall'—Poor Bob!" said Eleanor, cynically.

Anne could not hide a smile at the words but tried to smooth matters out by going to the window and speaking of the view.

"I've had landscape enough for one day, Anne, and could recover somewhat, if I had an opportunity, without having a family party about," retorted Barbara, meaningly.

Instantly, Mrs. Brewster turned and beckoned Polly to follow her from the room. The moment the door closed upon the hostess and her daughter, Barbara anticipated her friend's reproach.

"Anne, where were your brains when you recommended this awful place to father?"

"I had nothing to do with recommending it, Bob. Your father already knew of it and merely asked me to write Polly—my little pupil of a few years ago."

"But why didn't you tell *me* what to expect?" demanded the angry girl.

"Simply because I was asked not to mention any particulars that might prejudice you; and besides, you never asked me anything!" retorted Anne, feeling impatient with Barbara.

"What's more, Bob, I can't see any justice in making the poor Brewsters suffer for what your own father did! But I'm glad he sent us here—it is great!" declared Eleanor.

"Naturally, you find your level in a common country home and family!" said Barbara in an unpleasant voice.

"Words never killed any one, Bob, so keep it up if it makes you feel better. I'm used to your complaints," laughed Eleanor.

"And allow me to add, Bob, that the Brewsters are *not* common farmers. Mrs. Brewster had a better education and has more sense than any woman—other than my mother—that I know; and Mr. Brewster is a fine man respected by every one that knows him. Even the government admires his intelligence and worth, and employs him in cases where they need expert agricultural advice and reports!" Anne spoke with frankness and warmth.

"The government employs all sorts of men in its need, but that doesn't say the man is a gentleman, nor does it make his wife a lady. *Our*

mother is a lady and goes in the very best society in Chicago!" said Barbara.

"Society does not make the lady, but the lady makes society. Mrs. Brewster could form the most exclusive set in Chicago if she cared for that sort of thing!" came from Anne, curtly.

"But it would take money, my dear—a farmer couldn't afford an exclusive set!" jeered Barbara.

"If that is the case, the Brewsters could ride on Chicago society's very crest! But they never brag about their money!" laughed Anne, sarcastically.

Barbara's breath was suddenly taken away by this news but she recovered enough to say maliciously: "Oh, I see! That is why you take such a deep interest in John!"

"Barbara Maynard! you—you—if you dare say another word like that to Anne, I'll—I'll just pull your hair, so there!" cried Eleanor, running to Anne and throwing her arms around her neck.

Barbara felt ashamed of her words but she was too proud to confess it. So she tried to excuse herself by saying: "Of course, one can't be expected to fall right in with folks one never heard of before. Anne and you fancy a rural existence, so you naturally defend everything that goes with it. But I shall return home to-morrow on the very first train!"

"There is only one out a day, and you'll have to ask a favor of the farmer before you can get to Oak Creek station!" added Anne, with a bit of triumph in her tone.

Having relieved her heart of some of its bitterness, Anne felt sorry for Barbara, so she endeavored to change the current of their thoughts. She went to the window to raise the shade as far as it would go, and was struck with the wonderful sunset sky.

"Oh, girls! Come here and look at that glory!"

Eleanor rushed over, followed by Barbara who never wanted to miss anything good. All irritation was forgotten and healed as they stood gazing raptly at the beautiful view. The cliffs looked as if volcanic fires were again burning within their hearts, and the mist from the valley crept up to form an illusion of smoke rising from the sharply outlined peaks. A purple haze enveloped the mountains and the dusky-red streaks in the sky perfected the appearance of a vast eternal fire consuming the earth.

The sight had a salutary effect on the girls, and when they turned from the window, it was with the old friendship restored. But Barbara was of a complaining nature and must have something to

find fault with. This time it found innocent objects to bear the grumbling.

"Where are we expected to sleep? Both in the same bed?"

"Of course! Isn't it big enough? Why, I never saw such a wide bed; it's large enough to hold a dozen of us," said Eleanor.

"Where is your room, Anne?" Barbara asked, ignoring her sister's remark.

"I sleep here on the sofa," admitted Anne, fearing another scene.

"Sofa—impossible!" exclaimed Barbara.

"It is a bed-lounge, you know. It opens into the nicest bed!" explained Anne, taking hold of the loop that was partly hidden in the deep crease formed by the meeting of the seat and back.

"Watch me! I give a hard tug and presto! the upper half of the seat swings open and turns over like this. There we have a wide bed with ready-made mattress and all that goes to form a comfortable resting place."

Anne demonstrated her words and the city girls saw a low bed opened before their wondering eyes. The pillows and bedding were neatly folded and kept in a long shallow drawer under the sofa.

"How awful—to sleep on that!" cried Barbara.

"It looks like great fun! May I sleep here, Anne?" said Eleanor.

"Indeed you shall not! You will sleep with *me!*" snapped Barbara. Then turning to Anne again, she added: "Where are the wardrobes?"

"Those curtains hide the shelves we will use. You will find nails driven into the board against the wall."

"What! hang our expensive clothes on these common nails!—With only a calico drapery to protect them!" gasped Barbara.

"Leave your expensive clothes in the trunks, then. I am," laughed Eleanor.

"Nolla, I will need all of this one for myself; Anne and you will have to share the other one between you," remarked Barbara.

"I thought you were leaving on the early train to-morrow?" teased Eleanor, quickly.

To avoid another quarrel, Anne hastily said: "Oh, I forgot about the trunks. What shall I tell Mr. Brewster?"

"Tell him anything you like about Nolla's, but leave mine where the man can pick them up readily, to-morrow, when I leave," returned Barbara, in a nonchalant manner.

"How about the price of the ticket to Chicago?

You know we haven't more than a dollar between us?" suggested Eleanor, dryly.

Barbara had evidently forgotten the fact, but she was equal to the emergency. "I'll telegraph to the bank, the first thing in the morning, and have them wire me the money."

During this animated argument in the guest-chamber, a family gathering formed on the porch of the house.

"Mary, what shall we do with those seven huge trunks?" asked Mr. Brewster, quizzically watching Polly.

"Seven! Why, Paw!" exclaimed Polly, instantly picturing the wonderful things those trunks held. Creations such as she had pored over in the "Farm Journal Fashion Notes."

"I don't know, Sam, unless we leave them in the wagon until the girls decide what they wish done with them?" replied Mrs. Brewster.

Sary overheard the conversation and now ran out to see whether there really could be seven trunks!

"Laws me! Ah never see'd sech quare-shaped trunks—all bulgy at one side, and all them brass locks!"

"They are wardrobe trunks, Sary," remarked Mrs. Brewster.

Sary deigned no reply to the information but vented a bit of her ire against the new-comers by shrugging her great shoulders and saying: "Ef Ah w'ar you-all, Miss Brewster, Ah'd shore pitch them trunks clar over th' line inta Wyomin' state whar th' Injuns kin scramble fer th' fancy duds!"

"Oh, Sary, I smell the cherry-dumplings scorching!" cried Mrs. Brewster, suddenly, knowing the quickest way to rid herself of Sary.

Anne Stewart now came out and saw the group looking at the wagon. "The girls won't bother to unpack to-night, Mr. Brewster, so we may as well leave the trunks in the wagon and take them to the barn."

Jeb was sent to the barn with the wagon and contents, and Mr. Brewster retired to the lean-to back of the kitchen where he washed his face and hands in a tin basin. He had dried his hair and face, when Sary called to her mistress that the meal was ready.

Polly and her mother added the last touches to the table, when Mr. Brewster came to the door saying: "Well, Ah'm ready, Maw!"

"Run and call the girls, Polly; I think Anne went to tell them about the trunks," said Mrs. Brewster.

Unwillingly, Polly obeyed and rapped on the door. "Supper's waiting."

While Polly was absent on her errand, Jeb came into the kitchen, took a home-spun towel from its peg on the back of the door, and his hair-brush from a small cabinet in the corner. With these toilet articles he went out again to the lean-to where the crude oak bench held the basin and soap. The pump was nearby, and Jeb filled the basin quickly and proceeded to immerse his whole head.

Unfortunately, at the moment the city maidens reached the kitchen door leading from the living-room, Jeb was guggling loudly. Then he stood up and snorted as he shook his mane free from the streaming water.

Eleanor turned toward Anne with a smile of amusement on her face, but Barbara expressed her disgust with an emphatic "Ugh!"

Polly saw and heard, but failed to understand, as she had been gradually accustomed to Jeb and his uncouth ways. But Mrs. Brewster comprehended the shock it must have been to the city girls and tried to cover the unfortunate incident.

"Anne, will you seat your friends at that side of the table? Polly and I will sit on this side. Mr. Brewster always sits at the head, you know,

and I leave the other end for Sary as it is nearest the stove where she can reach it without walking so far."

Jeb came in and immediately pulled out a chair and sat down in his accustomed place, regardless of the standing ladies. Barbara looked on in amazement but said nothing. She was past words!

As they all sat down, Eleanor happened to catch her sister's eye and expression, and turned suddenly to Anne. Anne, too, had seen the horror on Barbara's face as Jeb reached over the table for a spoon Sary had forgotten to place beside his plate.

Eleanor raised the napkin to hide her laughing face, but Mr. Brewster construed the act to be one of reverence, and he approved of such tendencies in the young. Consequently, he hastened to say grace. Barbara sat stiff-necked throughout the lengthy prayer because she felt so rebellious at everything and with everything, that she wouldn't pay heed to the usual courtesy at prayer-time.

The moment Mr. Brewster said "Amen," Sary carried the large soup-pot from the stove and was about to ladle the soup into the bowls when Barbara said icily: "None for me, thank you!"

Jeb was tying his napkin about his neck, but at such a surprising refusal he gaped at the stranger. However, the fact that his own soup-plate was now placed before him ended the speechless shock.

He began eating at once, and the three boarders watched him scoop up the liquid as if his life depended upon finishing the work. The amount of noise he made while accomplishing the feat was a revelation to the Maynard girls and mortifying to Mrs. Brewster.

Sary concluded her serving and sat down to enjoy her own meal. She used the blade of her knife as a shovel and the fork-prongs as a pick. When she was not spearing or loading food upon either, she was using the silver as an eloquent means of expressing her conversation—which was voluble.

The moment supper ended, Mr. Brewster remarked: "The trunks are safe in the barn. Whenever you need them you can tell Jeb, and he will see that they are carried in for you."

"Thank you, but I shall have them taken back to Oak Creek to-morrow as I have no idea of remaining to spoil my summer," returned Barbara haughtily.

Mr. Brewster made no reply but excused himself and went out to the wide steps of the front

porch where he sat down to watch the peaceful twilight as it crept slowly over the mountain peaks.

Here, the rest of the family soon joined him, and the wonderful western night, as the brilliant stars sparkled seemingly so near to earth, had its soothing effect on the perturbed hearts and minds of all present. When Mrs. Brewster finally mentioned that it was bed-time the individuals in the group felt more amiably disposed towards each other.

Anne Stewart was awake bright and early in the morning and, finding the sisters sleeping soundly, crept out to enjoy the invigorating breezes blowing down from the mountain-peaks.

Some time later, Eleanor sat up and rubbed her eyes, at a loss to remember where she was. After a moment, however, she saw the sofa and laughed merrily.

"Oh, won't you be quiet! What is the matter with you?" complained Barbara, sleepily.

"Nothing—I feel so alive! Get up and hear the birds sing," replied Eleanor, springing out of bed and running over to the window.

"Oh, Bob! Look at the dazzling mountain-peaks, over there! I suppose these cool breezes come straight from those ice-tops," exclaimed Eleanor.

"I may as well get up or you'll cause a riot of noise," answered Barbara, querulously.

"Of course I will. I slept so well that I could dance on a trapeze just now. How did you sleep?"

"Why—what does it matter to you?" countered Barbara peevishly.

"Matter? Why, that bed removes one of the obstacles to your remaining here," laughed Eleanor, triumphantly.

Barbara would not admit that she had never slept better nor would she prevaricate, so she merely said: "I am going to Oak Creek the moment we finish breakfast and wire father's bank for money."

"Might as well find out, first, if you can use the team and wagon. Jeb only goes to town when anything has to be had here or shipped away by train. A trip of twelve miles is not a trifle every day in the week," remarked Eleanor.

"I'll ride a horse to Oak Creek myself. I'll not stand this awful place another day!" declared Barbara.

"You can't ride a horse without its owner's permission."

"Besides," added Eleanor as an afterthought occurred to her, "you only have your new travel-

ing suit and the little light summer frock here. The trunks are going back to Oak Creek to-day, you said, and your riding habit is in one of them."

Barbara made no reply to this statement and Eleanor drew on her stockings and then sought for her shoes which she had playfully aimed at Anne Stewart the night previous. One was found by the bureau and the other was seen under the window. She ran over to pick up the one by the window.

"Oh, Bob! Come here quick!"

"What is it?" cried Barbara, hastily running over to join her sister.

"My! The sun has just touched those snow-covered peaks! I never saw anything so dazzlingly beautiful!" sighed Eleanor, lost in contemplation of the sight.

Barbara also stood watching the sun-beams glancing over the towering peaks, and then she said apologetically:

"I never said the *scenery* wasn't wonderful. It is! But one cannot thrive on mountains, or associate with views."

"Still, it goes a long way towards creating environment, while the atmosphere and friendships are up to the individual," retorted Eleanor.

"Oh, well, you have the knack of making

friends with any one, but I am more reserved and ideal in nature, so I simply cannot accommodate myself to such people and places as this!"

"No, but you can accommodate yourself to some empty-headed society youth who hangs over your hotel-piazza chair and tells foolish fibs to feed your vanity!" scorned Eleanor.

Another sisterly scene might have ensued had not Anne entered the room at this critical time.

"Girls, better hurry and finish dressing as breakfast is almost ready to serve," said she, after a pleasant morning greeting.

"How long have you been up?" asked Barbara.

"Oh, an hour or more. I succeeded in working out a scheme I had to make things pleasanter for every one, and I want you to hurry and approve of it."

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE SCHEME THAT WORKED

ANNE lay with closed eyes for a long time revolving many plans for the ultimate harmony of that summer, and when she finally allowed herself to sleep, she had a scheme that she was going to try the next day.

As she came from her room early in the morning, she spied Polly sitting disconsolately on the porch-steps. She went over and sat down beside her.

"Polly, I cannot blame you for wishing we had never come, but now that we are here, let us see if we cannot make something out of the tangle of disappointments. Eleanor will love the place at once, as she is so much like you in nature, dear, but Bob always grumbles over things at first. No matter where or what it is, she feels that she is not showing her superiority if she is not condemning what she comes in contact with. It really is a disease, Polly, and I have tried to cure her

of it this last year. I am hoping for great things for her during this season, but I feel that I must confide in you to let you know just what the trouble is. Bob will make a fine woman if this hateful tendency is uprooted in time."

Polly smiled wanly, and Anne, wise young teacher, changed the subject then.

"What a pity one has to waste such glorious views and delightful weather while sitting at breakfast in the kitchen!"

"Where would you eat it?" laughed Polly, looking with amusement at her companion.

"Why, under that lovely group of oaks, to be sure," replied the teacher, pointing at the trees that shaded the well-kept grass plot and flower-beds at the side of the house.

"Under the trees!"

"Certainly; what do you suppose they were grown for if not for our uplift and joy?"

"Why, Miss Stewart, how funny of you! Who ever heard of having meals out-of-doors—except at picnics," laughed Polly.

"Every one who can now prefers out-of-doors to a stuffy room on summer days," replied Anne, calmly, but watching the effect of her words.

Satisfied with Polly's expression, she added: "Didn't you ever read about the garden parties

of society people, and the present-day trend to live on wide porches and out-of-doors at every opportunity? Your magazines ought to be full of such accounts."

"Oh, yes, in magazines, but I never dreamed it was true. I've studied every plan and picture I've seen in the magazines, and I loved to picture the beautiful places and furnishings they speak of."

Anne had heard from Polly's brother John, how his sister studied every item on decorating that could be found in papers or periodicals. But Anne did not know that Polly really had a latent talent in this line nor how ambitious she was to express art and beauty in the home.

"That is what I'd like to try here. Have our meals out under those trees. It won't make much extra work as the spot is very convenient to the kitchen door, but we will avoid the heat and steam from the stove and cooking, and have much more room, too."

"I don't suppose it makes much difference where we eat as long as we get it over with as soon as possible," returned Polly.

"That's just the trouble with most people. They merely eat because they feel they have to, but they never stop to make of the habit an opportunity to improve themselves and enjoy a social

meeting with each other. We may as well be Zulus and eat with our fingers. Maybe the Zulus would prove more ideal for their home teachings than we really are."

Polly laughed again at Anne's words, but the latter added:

"It's true, Polly. How many people trouble themselves to eat politely, and act or talk from the highest motives? The Zulus follow traditional customs. If we did we would follow the refined court manners of our English and Dutch ancestors. Instead, we are in such haste to eat and get back to the business of making money, that we lose all the pleasure along the way there."

Polly listened anxiously and understood that Anne was gently criticizing what she saw and heard in the kitchen the night before. Anne watched Polly's face and knew she comprehended, then she continued:

"If we have breakfast in the open air it will be much cooler for every one, and Sary need not stop her routine work on account of our being in her way in the kitchen. If we help and wait on ourselves Sary need not be delayed by our tardiness in appearing at table."

"Miss Stewart, I think you're right. And one

good thing about eating out here is that we won't feel crowded together with nothing to look at but each other. At least we have the mountains, if we make the oak-trees our new dining-room."

Anne laughed at the manner of Polly's approval and said: "Yes, Polly, the mountains are great and wonderful and so silent, besides."

"Let's go now and ask Maw what she thinks of the plan."

"In a moment, Polly. You know I am anxious to help you in every way, and to teach you if you express yourself poorly?"

"Yes; that's the only good thing about this awful visit," admitted the girl.

"Then allow me to correct an error in speech. If you wish to go to Denver High this fall, I want you to use refined expressions."

Anne looked at her companion and smiled kindly, and Polly said: "Oh, I'll be so glad to correct any mistakes. Tell me what?"

"Just now you called your mother 'Maw.' And I have heard you call your father 'Paw.' They are western terms, but they are not considered correct or refined, elsewhere. The name of Father or Mother is a term of respect and loving reverence from the children. I would like to have

you accustom yourself to the use of these titles for your parents and see how the very sound of it will cause you to *feel* more affection."

Polly weighed this news thoughtfully but she was surprised at the information that her customary "Maw" and "Paw" were not the most desirable terms to use. She knew that Anne Stewart knew better than she what was the proper manner of speech and she thanked her for her interest in helping her.

"Then another thing I want you to do, Polly, is that you call me 'Anne.' I am to be with you as one of the family all this summer, and the 'Miss' is too formal for members in the same family. I want to ask this favor of your mother and father too. If you were to use Eleanor's and Barbara's first names for them as I do, I think they would feel more at home."

"Oh, Miss—I mean Anne, I will love to call you that, but I never *could* have courage enough to call that proud girl by the name of 'Bob'!" declared Polly.

Anne laughed and patted her apt pupil on the head, then she said, "Shall we go in search of your mother and ask about the breakfast table?"

Polly jumped up and led the way to the kitchen door where Sary was hard at work.

"Sary, can you tell us where my mother is?" asked Polly.

"Your maw's just went to th' buttery to skim the milk," said she, giving Polly an opportunity to compare the two terms.

As the two girls went toward the buttery, Polly admitted: "Anne, it does make a difference, I think."

Anne nodded brightly and opened the creamery-door. Mrs. Brewster stood with skimmer in hand, taking the rich cream from the pans of milk. She looked up with a welcoming smile as the two girls came in.

"Mother, Anne's been giving me 'first aid' in manners," laughed Polly, watching her mother's expression keenly.

"In which line, dear; there are several you can improve in," rejoined Mrs. Brewster, with a loving little laugh.

"Didn't you hear me? I have improved upon your name."

"I noticed it, but I wanted to make sure it was intentional and not a mistake."

"Tell me—do you like it?" asked Polly, eagerly.

"Indeed I do, dear; I never could abide that name of 'Maw' and 'Paw' that is common with the ranchers."

"Then why didn't you tell me this long ago! Oh, mother!"

"If I corrected you, and the other children at school heard you use different terms from those they were accustomed to, they would think you 'proud' and 'too good for a rancher.' I have heard that criticism so often, that I have given up trying to better conditions or express my own desires in anything that an illiterate and inexperienced neighbor may find fault with. I just accept things as they are, now, but hope for better things for my children."

This was a new light on her mother, and Polly felt subdued by it. She wondered if her mother would have been any different if she had been in Mrs. Maynard's place.

"You see," continued Mrs. Brewster, turning to Anne, "one so gets to dread the free speech and narrow-minded opinions of some ranchers that one forbears in *everything,* rather than have strife and ill-will from those one must meet at times."

Anne nodded. "But sometimes it is better to take the risk of offending the whole community if one finally wins out."

Mrs. Brewster looked approvingly at the girl, and Polly changed the conversation by saying:

"Mother, Anne and I have a plan that will surprise you."

Mrs. Brewster smiled encouragingly for the girls to speak.

"It's just this: we think it will be lovely to move the table out under the trees. There the air and view can be enjoyed and afford us ample subjects for conversation," explained Anne.

"Anne, splendid! After my experience of last night I would hail any change. But this is really good. I never thought of it myself," replied Mrs. Brewster, with relief.

On their walk to the kitchen, they planned to remove the table and chairs; then Mrs. Brewster added: "My husband breakfasted an hour ago but said he would be back when we sat down for coffee. He enjoys a second cup at his leisure. And I'm quite sure Sary gave Jeb his breakfast after I left the kitchen, so that gives us a clear start for the first meal to-day."

Sary was found upon her knees before the kitchen range, polishing the nickel name-plate on the oven door. A dish-pan of hot water and a scrubbing brush stood upon the floor beside her. As Mrs. Brewster came in, Sary glanced up impatiently.

"Ah de'clar t' goodness! Ah wish you-all'd

eat that brekfus an' vamoose outen my way. Ah hes t' scrub this hull floor soon ez th' stove's shined!"

"That's exactly why I came in, Sary—to get breakfast out of your way," returned Mrs. Brewster, sending a swift glance at Polly and Anne.

As Sary's words made way for their work, all fell to with a vim. Polly and Anne carried dishes and chairs out of the room, while Mrs. Brewster whisked off the cloth and asked the maid to help her carry the table out under the trees.

No reply came from Sary, and the mistress turned to see why she did not come to assist. The ludicrous expression on the widow's face, as she sat bolt upright with her blackened hands raised heavenward in silent protest, made Mrs. Brewster laugh.

"What's the matter, Sary?"

"Yore a clar case o' bein' locoed!" gasped the help.

"Not at all, but you want to scrub the floor, don't you?"

"Ah don't need th' furnishin's taken out fer that!"

"But we want to eat, you see, and under the trees we'll be quite out of your way. Here, Anne,

help me with the table, will you, please?" said Mrs. Brewster, with finality.

The table was firmly placed under the trees and the cloth relaid. Then the willowware dishes and old Tuttle silver were arranged by Anne, while Polly watched eagerly.

"I do believe those old blue dishes look ten times as nice out here as in the kitchen!" declared Polly, while Anne placed a few wild flowers on the center of the table.

"Merely the effect of your mental testimony, Polly. In the kitchen, with steam, working utensils, and crowed sense of room, everything takes on a sordid look and feeling. But out in God's sunshine and fresh air, everything looks and feels better. That is why sun and air are the best physician for any ill," explained Anne.

Mrs. Brewster heard, and watched Anne with a bright smile, as the sentiment of the words were exactly what she ofttimes thought. When the three returned to the kitchen to take the biscuits and other breakfast food out, Sary stood with head thrown back and body rocking back and forth as she laughed immoderately.

"Do tell, Mis' Brewster! You-all bean't goin' t' *eat* out thar, now be yuh?"

"Why, of course!" retorted Polly.

"Why shouldn't we?" asked Mrs. Brewster.

Sary could not explain, so she turned to the stove while mumbling to herself the doubts she had over the sanity of the women-folks of this queer family—excepting herself of course!

Anne had gone to the guest-room to call the girls, and to her relief, found them both dressed and ready for breakfast.

"It's a lovely morning," said she, in greeting to them.

"Yes, I've been sniffing the sweetness at the open window," replied Eleanor, but Barbara stood unresponsive.

Anne noticed the simple-looking house-frocks they wore, and felt relieved at the simplicity of color and lines, although she knew that the name-tag inside of those dresses spoke silently of their cost.

"We're going to breakfast out on the lawn—it is perfectly charming there," explained Anne, leading the way from the living-room by way of the front door in order to avoid Sary and her scrub-pail.

But Sary had been anxiously peeping from the crack of the kitchen door, and felt mortally offended when the company went out by the front

way. "Was it not enough that the folks were too far removed from the kitchen to permit Sary to overhear what was said at table, but now they have to walk out at the Sunday door?"

So thought the widow as she left her peep-hole back of the door and stood watching from the open window by the cupboard.

Every one seemed in a pleasanter mood than that of the previous evening, and as breakfast advanced, Eleanor went so far as to ask her sister to remain at the ranch a few days, at least. And Barbara, although she would not admit it, knew the bed was exceptionally good and the breakfast most enjoyable, while the air and scenery were simply wonderful!

When Mr. Brewster came along the path leading from the barn, he stood near a lilac bush for a few moments watching the pretty group under the trees. But he couldn't understand having breakfast outside the usual place—the kitchen!

"Is this a picnic?" asked he, at length, coming forward.

"Good morning, Paw—Father! Isn't this fun?" cried Polly.

Mrs. Brewster and Anne exchanged glances at Polly's error and correction, but Sam Brewster failed to notice the new term. He bowed to the

three guests and smilingly took the chair his wife placed for him at the table.

While Mrs. Brewster poured his coffee, she remarked: "This is Polly's and Anne's idea. Isn't it sensible—and much pleasanter than in the stuffy kitchen?"

He nodded approval and Polly felt satisfied. Then as her father sipped his fragrant coffee, she said: "Anne was just saying that I ought to show them the Rainbow Cliffs after breakfast."

"It's so clear to-day Ah wouldn't be surprised but what you-all will see Pagoda Peak and Grizzly Slide from the Cliffs, Polly," added Mr. Brewster.

"If we can, they'll like it; it's a wonderful sight, Anne, with the sun shining on the snow-capped crests," explained Polly.

"And then you can take them over there some day, Polly. A good lunch can be packed into Choko's panniers, and with sure-footed horses the ride will be most delightful," added Mrs. Brewster.

"Maw, you can go, too. You agreed to take things easy, you know," reminded her husband.

"Oh, Sam! Riding over the Flat Top Mountains would be the hardest work for me, these days!" laughed Mrs. Brewster.

"Pshaw now! You used to ride better than any cow-boy in these parts, and you can't tell me those days are past," argued Mr. Brewster, dropping the habit of using western terms in his eagerness.

"I've heard of Mrs. Brewster's famous riding," now chimed in Anne.

"She can ride better'n Pa—Father, or any one I ever saw!" Polly maintained.

Mrs. Brewster shook her head in a vain effort to discourage such praise, then she turned to the Maynard girls, saying: "Do you understand western horses? They are rather difficult at times, you know."

"We ride daily when in Chicago," said Barbara, boastfully.

"But city horses are mere nags, Bob. These half-wild animals accustomed to roaming the plains, are something worth while, you will find," laughed Anne.

"I'd advise your going to the corral and having Jeb try out the horses for you, before you undertake any long jaunt," suggested Mrs. Brewster.

"We can visit the Cliffs this morning, and try riding this afternoon," added Polly eagerly.

"Then Bob and I will have to get our habits from one of the trunks in the barn," said Eleanor.

"Bob and you run along and do that while

Polly and I make the beds and clear away the breakfast," ventured Anne, looking at Mrs. Brewster. Barbara seemed as interested as any one.

So Barbara and Eleanor followed Mr. Brewster to the barn to point out the trunk they wanted to open, while Polly cleared the table and Mrs. Brewster went with Anne to make the beds. As they worked in the guest-room, they exchanged confidences about the two visitors.

"It seems the lovely morning has had a salutary effect on Barbara's feelings regarding Pebbly Pit," ventured Anne.

"I hope so," replied Mrs. Brewster, diffidently.

"You see, Eleanor is broad-minded—more like her father, but Bob takes too much after her mother to adapt herself readily to such a radical change as a ranch," continued Anne, apologetically.

"Eleanor appears to be a nice girl."

"Bob will shortly be as satisfied as Nolla, but she just can't let go of herself and her foolish training in a minute. If we have a few pleasant outings to show her how really wonderful the country is, she will open out in her natural sweet self."

"It certainly isn't a pleasant surprise, to expect a modern fashionable Summer Resort and then

find a forgotten nook in the pit of an extinct volcano," laughed Mrs. Brewster, humorously.

"Yes, Bob was terribly upset last night. I fancy she was regretting those seven trunks filled with expensive clothes," added Anne, smiling at the remembrance.

"I can't but wonder that such a sensible girl as you seem to be, can be so fond of a girl so different from you in every way," remarked Mrs. Brewster, looking Anne in the eyes.

Anne flushed. "When you know her as I do, you will see that she really is not snobbish, but only assumes it. As I said, she is the result of silly training by a society mother. I have seen the genuine nature buried by habits and I am willing to help her bring it out to establish it permanently. Nolla will develop herself, if she is allowed to express herself without constant ridicule or reprimands. This summer ought to do wonders for both those girls."

Mrs. Brewster showed her approval by nodding her head affirmatively at Anne.

"You had ample time to study the two girls last winter when they were in Denver, I suppose," suggested Mrs. Brewster.

"Yes, I was with them most of the time, and the result of the erroneous influence over Bob was

always noticeable after a short visit from Mrs. Maynard. She only visited her daughters twice in the eight months, but it was generally so unpleasant a time for every one, that we were relieved that she had too many social engagements to come oftener." Anne bent down to tuck in the sheets as she spoke so frankly concerning her friends' mother.

"But I must not disparage Mrs. Maynard in your eyes—you may find in her many fine qualities that have been hidden from me," quickly added Anne, fearing she had given her hostess a wrong idea.

"Perhaps they are hidden very deep."

Anne laughed. "Mr. Maynard is just splendid. He is so *human! He* must have found the good qualities in his wife, and she, doubtless, permitted herself to be misled by vain aspirations to reach a social height offered by her husband's success in business."

"Love is blind, Anne. When a man fancies himself in love with a pretty girl, he seldom seeks for lasting qualities or a strong character. He accepts the transitory beauty as the real thing and wakes up, too late, to find he entertained a dream."

"I think you and I feel alike in this problem;

my friends laugh at my—what they call—unreasonable opinions on marriage," said Anne, eagerly inviting a discussion with Mrs. Brewster.

"Some other day, Anne. We still have the task before us of acclimating the city girls," laughed Mrs. Brewster, taking Anne by the arm and leading her from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

ACCLIMATING THE CITY GIRLS

"WAITING for me, girls?" called Anne, joining her friends.

"We just got back from the barn," said Eleanor, showing the habits which she had over her arms.

"Well, take them to the room and change your shoes. We must wear flat-heeled boots for walking about this place, you know," returned Anne, noting that Eleanor carried both habits—doing her sister's work for her, as usual.

"Good gracious! I forgot to unpack the walking shoes. Won't these Cuban heels answer?" cried Barbara, impatiently.

"They might answer for a twisted ankle," laughed Anne.

"Then we'll postpone the walk till to-morrow," said Barbara, decisively.

"Not me! I'm going to the cliffs if I walk barefooted. In fact, I'm not so sure but that will be

the most delightful thing to do," said Eleanor, sitting down to unbutton her high-heeled shoes.

"Nolla! Stop disgracing us so!" cried Barbara, shocked.

"Well, I want to see those cliffs at close range. If you start for home to-morrow—or maybe this afternoon, if you find the cliffs disappointing—I can at least take back the remembrance of the wonderful spot," pouted Eleanor.

To avoid the usual argument between the sisters, Anne quickly made a suggestion. "Bob's feet seem to be about the same size as mine, and she can have my tennis shoes for this walk."

"And Polly's feet look about my size! Why can't I borrow a pair of her country shoes?" added Eleanor, eagerly.

"Nolla! Your feet are very slim while Polly's are broad as are most country girls. You would ruin your feet in clumsy shoes," exclaimed Barbara.

Polly looked appealingly at her mother, so she came to the rescue. "I have always been very careful of Polly's feet, as I can see no advantage in ruining a child's feet, hence you will find Polly's shoes are made by a first-class shoemaker."

"Do they have such things in Oak Creek?" came sarcastically from Barbara.

"Do they have them in Denver and Chicago?" retorted Anne.

"Naturally—in Chicago. To meet the need for our class." And Barbara tossed her head defiantly.

"Polly, run and find those last shoes we had made on the scientific last plan," came from Mrs. Brewster.

Polly vanished and Anne ran to her room for the tennis shoes. Barbara walked away and stood on the terrace looking at the far-off peaks. Eleanor and Mrs. Brewster glanced at each other, and finding a similar expression in each other's eyes, both smiled. Thereafter a better understanding existed between the two.

"Staring up at white-topped mountains ought to be good and elevating for you, Bob," began Eleanor, teasingly, when Anne returned.

"Here, Bob, try them on," suggested Anne, holding out her brand new tennis shoes.

Then Polly returned with a neat pair of boots with good extension soles. Eleanor took them, turned down the top and looked at the label. She threw back her head and laughed mockingly.

"What a blow to Bob's pride in the Maynard feet! Here we have to come to Pebbly Pit and

find our pet label in Polly's shoes. I'm sure the Maynards will change cobblers hereafter!"

Every one laughed at Eleanor, but Barbara occupied herself with trying on Anne's tennis shoes. Eleanor sat down upon the grass and soon had on Polly's common-sense shoes.

"They fit to a dot!" exclaimed she, holding out one foot to verify her statement.

"Well, then, if you feel you can wear them comfortably, do let's start before some other delay occurs," said Barbara, petulantly.

The four young folks started on the trail that wound about the cliffs, and Mrs. Brewster went indoors to cook some old-fashioned doughnuts —a large stone crock of which was always kept in the pantry.

The walk seemed very long to Barbara, who was unaccustomed to much walking, but the other three girls reveled in the exhilarating air and bright morning sunshine. Reaching the first cliffs, Polly explained about the volcanoes of that section of Colorado and showed the visitors many interesting formations of lava.

They were about to continue to the Giant Guards, when Barbara complained of aching feet. She declared it was the rough trail and not her

tender feet that caused the pain and ache. So the girls sat down to rest, while Polly told of trips to other volcanic craters and peaks. They were about to start on their way again, when the echoes of a lively whistle sounded over the lava walls.

"It's Jeb going to the corral to find our horses for this afternoon," explained Polly, leaning out over a fragment of lava to see who was passing by.

But Jeb did not pass. He called loudly for his young mistress. "Miss Pol-lee—Ah got sumthin fer you-all!"

"Come up here, Jeb! We're resting on the Giant Guards!" shouted Polly.

Soon Jeb appeared on the edge of the cliffs and held out a huge paper bag that had great grease-spots here and there on its sides and bottom.

"Yer Maw hed me bring these dunnits t' you-all, ez Ah come by. She sez fer you-all t' let me have anudder one, too."

"Oh, they are still warm!" exclaimed Eleanor, as Polly handed her one from the bag.

"Shore! But that makes 'em tas' better!" declared Jeb, anxiously watching Polly hand one to Anne next, and one to Barbara, before remembering him.

"They're horribly greasy things," said Barbara, holding the doughnut fastidiously with the tip-ends of her fingers.

"Mebbe folks'd call 'em by anudder name ef no grease war used t' cook 'em by. Ah likes 'em, howsomeever, grease an' all!" returned Jeb, grinning with relief as Polly gave him two large ones.

"Um! But they're good!" Eleanor smacked her lips at the first bite.

"I can't eat mine—they look so impossible!" And Barbara raised her hand and threw her doughnut over the cliff.

"Oo-ah!" came from Jeb in dismay, but he hurriedly left the girls.

Polly was surprised, too, but she merely said: "We never waste anything worth while. The chickens and pigs like doughnuts—if we ever have any left for them."

Anne had to turn away to hide a smile, and at that moment she saw Jeb at the foot of the cliff, glancing up to see if any one saw him pick up the discarded delicacy from the ground.

The incident over the doughnut silenced Polly as she led the way between the two giant peaks of lava. They reared their heads more than sixty feet high and were so oddly shaped that they de-

rived their names of "Giant Guards" from the spears seemingly held out from the shoulders to challenge passersby.

The trail leading between the Guards was not more than six feet wide but immediately after passing them, one reached a semi-circle of cliffs standing about a natural arena. Opposite the trail that opened on this arena, a narrow canyon descended gradually away out of sight.

"These cliffs forming the rim of the bowl are called the 'Imps' Tombstones.' If you examine them closer, you will find they have queer faces and all sorts of strange patterns traced on their bodies," explained Polly, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

"This bowl—as Polly calls it—is as large as Yale Campus, isn't it?" said Eleanor, hoping to establish conversation.

"Everything about Pebbly Pit is on a large scale—even the hearts of the owners," added Anne, patting Polly on the back.

"Pardon me for differing, Anne—not the feet of the owners," laughed Eleanor, sending a teasing look at her sister.

"Mother says this bowl seems to have been a small crater belonging to the great pit yonder, when the volcano was active in the centuries long

gone by," explained Polly, as the others ignored Eleanor's remark.

"These Imps certainly are strange formations! Some with arms flung high as if in defense, others crouching low as if to launch an arrow at the enemy. And see those—erect with proud mien, in defiance of all others. They must have been unvanquished," said Anne, interesting Barbara in spite of her assumed indifference.

"I just guess they weren't so cold and rusty-brown when the old demon spit fire at them from the active volcano," said Eleanor, gazing aloft at the grotesque heads with facial forms.

"Nolla! I beg of you to use better English! You know how mother trembles at your picked-up words from brother!" rebuked Barbara, seemingly shocked at her sister.

"What a tale these Imps could tell us of remote ages when they were flung aside as useless in the evolution of things!" said Anne, diverting a possible argument.

"I say, Anne, why wouldn't this place give you 'atmosphere' for that story you want to write, some day?" exclaimed Eleanor, unexpectedly.

Anne flushed and Polly looked at her in surprise. Barbara seemed amazed, too.

"Is this something I never heard of?" asked the latter.

"Oh, no; I once said to Nolla that I should love to be able to write a story, and she assured me I could do it. She is only teasing, as usual," laughed Anne, and at the first opportunity, she managed to give Eleanor a smart rap on the shoulder for her breach of confidence.

Leaving the Imps behind, Polly took the trail that led to the "Devil's Causeway"—the ravine that cleft two towering peaks of lava. This chasm descended abruptly to a depth of over five hundred feet and then as abruptly ascended to the level of the distant end of the trail, where it brought one to the ridge that over-looked Bear Forks Valley.

"Do you want to go through the Devil's Causeway?" asked Polly.

"Oh, by all means!" exclaimed Anne.

"I wish we had thought of bringing the camera," said Barbara.

"We will some other day. Now let us see the best views to get," quickly replied Anne, glad to hear Barbara express herself favorably.

"You people go down into that yawning grave, while I sit here and plot out a preface for Anne's book," said exhausted Eleanor, selecting a bowlder where she could sit and see far and wide

"I'd just as soon stay with Eleanor while you two go down and back again," ventured Polly.

"All right; Bob and I will see what's to be seen and be back shortly," agreed Anne, starting down the trail.

The two young girls sat high upon the lava bowlder while Polly pointed out different familiar spots and mountain peaks. Then Eleanor turned and looked curiously at her companion.

"Does your father own all of this great estate free and clear?" asked she.

"Free and clear! What do you mean—that he cleared it of timber and freed it of sage-brush?"

Eleanor laughed heartily. "Mercy no! I never thought of that. I meant a mortgage, you know."

"I don't know what a mortgage is. But father never had to clear the place much as it was always rich free soil without brush."

Eleanor glanced quizzically at Polly. "Humph! My father knows what a mortgage is, poor man! Mother made him do it to get her a French car this spring. If your father was my father and owned all this vast place free and clear, my mother would mortgage it in a jiffy if she married him!"

"Well, she didn't!" came decidedly from Polly, with a grateful sigh of relief.

Eleanor laughed in appreciation. "Say, Polly, my father would like you down to the ground!"

Polly made no reply and Eleanor looked about her again. "Polly, how does it feel to own such wonderful things as you just showed us? And such a great farm as you have?"

"I never thought of it. In fact, I don't believe any of us remember who owns them. Everybody is welcome to help themselves to these cliffs and the jewels at Rainbow Cliffs."

"How much do you s'pose your father is worth?" now asked Eleanor, showing a trace of Mrs. Maynard's teachings.

"I never asked him. We never thought of his being worth more than we might need."

"Oh, but you never can need all those cattle, and the vast farm, or the wheat and other products he ships and they bring in money," persisted the daughter of a banker.

"He sends it off 'cause we can't let it spoil, you know," replied the thrifty rancher's daughter. "But I don't know how much money he may be worth. Maybe a hundred thousand dollars for the land, and maybe another hundred thousand in cattle. I've heard John and Father talk over an offer of half a million dollars for part interest in

the Rainbow Cliffs, but Dad wouldn't spoil 'em."

"What! What did you say he refused?" shrilled Eleanor.

Polly turned suddenly to look at her companion. She was surprised at the expression on Eleanor's face.

"I never lie. Why should I?" she cried in defense.

"No, but you must have been joking!"

"I wasn't! Why should I joke?" retorted Polly.

"But goodness me, girl! If your father was as rich as all that, why would you care about wasting a doughnut? And look at your mother making her own butter and helping in housework! Anne says she even spins her own linen towels and knits your stockings. What under the sun would she work like that for, if she could afford to live better'n we do?" cried Eleanor, incredulously.

"My mother doesn't *have* to do a thing, unless she wants to. She just likes to do it for us, and it sure does make a home!" declared Polly, fondly, as she looked across the Pit to her home.

"Ye-es—I guess it does; but then some mothers can't sew and spin and cook, you see, so where would the home be if we didn't have servants and

folks to do for us?" sighed Eleanor, comparing her own homelife to Polly's—to the latter's advantage.

"What does your mother do, Nolla?" asked Polly, sympathetically.

"Oh, she is a society leader, you know. She goes calling, and has bridge parties every week. Then she has her teas and dinners, and the balls, or theater parties, in season. Other times she has her clubs and Welfare Work—she is President of a Charity Work, you see, and has to address her members every once in a while," said Eleanor, warming up to her description as she visualized her mother's important life-interests.

"Anne told us about how sick you were two years ago, and how you had to leave home to live in Denver all last winter," said Polly, a compassionate note creeping into her voice as she pitied the girl at her side.

"Well, I got better, didn't I?" came from Eleanor, shortly; then she said tenderly: "Anne and her mother were great!"

"Yes, but I was thinking if it was me—so sick that the doctors feared I would never be well again—do you s'pose *my* mother would have stayed at home when I was with strangers in Denver? I *reckon not!* All the butter, or balls, or

charities in the world could not have kept her from my side every minute I was sick!"

Such emphasis found Eleanor lacking with a reply but her eyes filled up at the thought of a love that would sacrifice the world for a beloved child. Would her mother do that if she realized any danger to her children? Ah, that is what hurt!

"Polly, my father would do as much for me, too!" said Eleanor, exultantly, the moment she remembered one parent who loved her unreservedly.

"So would mine."

"Then why should he object to your having a good education in Denver? And look at the way he dresses you, Polly! I don't want you to think I am poking fun at you, 'cause I'm not, but the way you slick back your hair into two long braids and the baggy skirts you wear are simply outlandish. If I had that wonderful curly chestnut hair I'd make so much of it that I'd look positively beautiful."

Polly felt hurt, not only because of her love of the beautiful in everything, but also because she hoped Eleanor would turn out to be a staunch friend. Now, of course, she wouldn't make friends with such an old-fashioned country girl!

"It's much easier to keep the hair out of my

face when it's slicked back. Besides, there isn't any dress-maker in Oak Creek better'n my mother. But she doesn't have much time to trim dresses. When I go to Denver, I'll have as fine a wardrobe as yours."

"If your father has any money why doesn't he buy an automobile instead of using that awful ranch-wagon? And why doesn't he hire servants to do the work your mother now does? She could sew on your clothes, if she had more time."

"Mother never liked to have me think much of dress and I have always been so busy with my pets and trips on the mountains, that I generally lived in my riding clothes during vacations. But my shoes are as good as yours—you said so. And my teeth and hands and feet are as carefully taken care of as yours or any one's!"

Eleanor admitted that this was so, but Polly still had to prove that her father had money. And she insisted upon the fact being proven.

"If you don't believe me, you can write to my brother John," declared Polly. "His best college friend visited here last vacation-time and simply went crazy over Rainbow Cliffs. He went so far as to have an expert mineralogist come over here to examine the stones. This man was out west on business for Tom Latimer's father, and Tom

said it would cost next to nothing to send for him. The man said the jewels would create the greatest wild-cat speculations in New York if they were placed on the market. Those were his very words!"

"Tom Latimer! Do you know him?" gasped Eleanor.

"He's John's chum. He visited here for several weeks and we had the loveliest times! I liked him a lot."

"I should think you would! But, Polly, Tom is several years older than you. In fact he is older than Bob, as she found out when she tried to capture him for herself. His father is one of the richest financiers in New York."

"I didn't think of his age, although now you speak of it, I suppose he must be about John's age. But he acted like a big boy, so we had fine times," explained Polly, entirely innocent of Eleanor's hints regarding the young man.

Eleanor threw back her head and laughed heartily. "Just wait until I tell Bob this. Oh, how she will envy you your chance. Why, she did everything on earth but fling herself at his head when mother told her he was the richest catch of the season."

"Why, he told me he was never going to marry

until he found another girl like Anne Stewart! He thinks *she* is splendid. I asked him why he didn't marry her, and he teased me by saying I wanted to know too much. But he did tell me that Anne loved some one else who was a thousand times better than he, so he had no chance with her."

Eleanor glanced sharply at Polly to see whether she was innocent of guile or whether she was trying to hide her real meaning. She saw that her young companion had really no thought of love for herself or for her brother John. So Eleanor never hinted that she had a suspicion of the truth about Anne and John.

"Do you think Anne liked Tom Latimer?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! But she likes him because he is such a friend of my brother's and her brother's. You see, Anne's brother Paul is at college with John and Tom," replied Polly.

"Yes, I know. My brother is one of their class-mates, too. But I never met your brother or Paul. Mother said I was too young to appear in the drawing-room when Pete gave his party to his class-mates this spring."

"Oh, I've heard about a 'Pete' who is so clever

in his engineering class. Is that your brother?" eagerly asked Polly.

"Yes, and we're proud of him! At least Dad and I are. I don't suppose mother will feel proud of him until he marries a rich society girl. And Bob never bothers about what he does."

Now all this was new and strange gossip to Polly and she was willing to hear more along the same lines, but Anne and Barbara returned from the ravine, and the former called to them:

"Have you been wondering what kept us so long, girls?"

"Never thought of you. We've been getting acquainted," replied Eleanor, with a smile at Polly.

"That's good. Now let's go and visit Rainbow Cliffs," added Anne.

"Lead off, Polly and I will follow," said Eleanor, linking her arm through Polly's.

Polly was not only surprised but pleased at Eleanor's evident act of friendship. She had never had a girl-friend of her own age to confide in, and she had felt very diffident with these city girls after their arrival. But the short talk while sitting on the bowlder not only established a firmer foundation for good comradeship between the

two girls, but it gave each a better appreciation of the other's character.

After a circuitous walk, the four girls reached the cliffs where the jeweled stones shone resplendent from the side-walls and ground where tons of them were piled up in abandoned confusion.

"No wonder they are named Rainbow Cliffs! I never saw such a dazzling sight as these green, blue, red, and other colored stones!" cried Anne.

"They are so beautiful that it seems as if they are real jewels!" sighed Barbara, gazing raptly at the seemingly precious stones.

"Polly says a man offered a fabulous price for a small interest in this spot," remarked Eleanor, taking up a handful of the pebbles and letting them run between her fingers in a speculative manner, while she glanced covertly at her sister.

"Not really!" exclaimed Barbara, looking at Polly.

"Yes, but please let's not talk of it. Father does not like any of us to speak of it, as he fears John and I will have our heads turned," returned Polly, sending a reproachful look at Eleanor.

But Eleanor smiled with satisfaction, for she knew she had boosted Polly's value a thousand fold in Barbara's estimation.

"Well, I'd sell out if it was me! My, but the

good times I could have on the money this would bring!" sighed Barbara, glancing up at the masses of colored stones towering above her in the sunshine.

"My brother John says he is going to work these cliffs as soon as he finishes his college course of engineering," said Polly.

"And Tom Latimer is going to be his partner!" added Eleanor, watching her sister closely.

"Nolla, I didn't tell you that, at all!" cried Polly.

"Tom Latimer! Does *she* know him?" asked Barbara of Anne.

"I don't know, Bob; Paul and he are great friends of John Brewster's, you know."

Polly would not deign to look at Eleanor again, and took the homeward trail without another word as she felt pained at her newly found friend's misstatement of facts. But Eleanor had done it all for friendship's sake. She knew what a radical change all this information would make in Barbara's estimation of the Brewsters and the ranch, so she said more than she herself really believed true.

At that moment the dinner-horn sounded and the girls started for the house, without making further comment on the cliffs.

CHAPTER IX

SEVERAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

As the four girls came around the corner of the ranch-house Sary banged a plate of hot biscuits upon the table. Some of the biscuits bounced off and rolled across the snowy cloth, so Sary made a swift lunge to catch them before they fell upon the ground.

Without hesitation, she replaced the biscuits on the plate and glared at the boarders as she mumbled to herself: "Sech high-filutin' a'rs Ah never did see afore!"

The strangers looked at each other, wondering what the maid's perturbed manner portended. But Sary flounced back to the kitchen sending an angry glance over her shoulder before she entered that sacred precinct. She quickly returned with a glass dish of pear preserves and another dish of home-pickled peaches. These were so placed as to flank the biscuits when Sary spied an inquisitive hornet about to settle upon the preserves.

"Git out o' that!" shrilled she, whacking at the insect with her kitchen towel.

The hornet resented the vicious slap and flew straight for Sary's red head. She unceremoniously ducked and ran. But the insect buzzed after her with evil intent, so Sary ran for her sanctuary, slamming the screen door safely between herself and her pursuer. The audience watching beside the table laughed merrily at the rout.

At the sudden entrance of the maid into the kitchen, Mrs. Brewster asked, without looking up: "Did you place the butter and milk on the table, Sary?"

"It are!" from Sary, curtly.

Mrs. Brewster looked up in surprise. She saw Sary on the safe side of the screen-door glaring at the hornet, which was crawling slowly towards the crack in the opening, while buzzing threateningly, now and then.

"There's a hornet, Sary—better drive it away before you venture out again."

"Ah are."

"Take the kettle and dash some boiling water on it. It sounds angry enough to sting."

"It am," flared Sary, as if her anger, too, was vicious enough to do as the hornet would. But she turned to get the hot water and when she

returned to deluge the plague, lo! it was there no more.

"Sary, what's wrong with you since this morning? You've not been civil in any way," said Mrs. Brewster, impatiently.

"Wrong e'nuff! Jeb an' m'sef havin' t' eat meals all alone in a big kitchen that's fine e'nuff fer any one. But these fool gals is so high an' mighty they hez t' nibble at a table under the trees!" Sary's lofty scorn was only equaled by her majestic pose, as she delivered her sentence.

"You're wrong, Sary, we do *not* nibble at the table—we leave that for the field-mice," corrected Mrs. Brewster, sweetly.

Sary vented an explosive "Humph!" and grabbed the meat-platter. As she left the kitchen, she sent an insulted glance at her mistress, but the recent correction in speech made her forget the hornet. The watchful insect had been sitting directly over the door, and now eagerly resumed its drive on the enemy.

Despite her resolve to be dignified and scornful, Sary had to take flight before the group seated about the table. The girls laughed. One of the maid's loose shoes flew off during the race around the table and the hornet would have conquered her had not Mr. Brewster risen to the

occasion and downed the insect with his newspaper. His heavy boot finished the career of the "Hun-net" and Sary went back to the house, picking up her shoe as she passed its resting place.

Once more in the kitchen, she returned to the argument. "Ef it warn't that you-all hed this comp'ny an' would be worn out in no time, alone, Ah'd pack an' git, this day!" But in her heart the widow knew horses could not drag her from such luxury as she had only recently enjoyed. Besides, there was Jeb; he offered future possibilities of curtailing her widowhood.

While Sary delivered her opinion, Mrs. Brewster finished creaming the potatoes and now dished them up. As she started for the screen-door, she turned to the maid and said:

"Either you have a severe attack of indigestion coming on, Sary, or you are falling in love again. Both diseases present similar symptoms in their first stages."

"Mis' Brewster!"

But the mistress refused to look back even though the temptation to see Sary's face was great!

"Oh, Mis' Brewster! How kin you-all say that—so soon after Bill's funeral, an' the ex-

penses not all paid yit!" howled Sary, rushing to the door that her mistress might hear her lament.

But the call fell upon deaf ears. *Miss* Brewster deigned no reply, so Sary sat down heavily upon a strong kitchen chair and took thought for herself. How did Miss Brewster guess her half-formed idea? Had she discovered in some uncanny manner, that Sary had slyly removed Bill's post-card photograph from her Bible and cremated it that she might feel freer to accept a second proposal of marriage—if it came?

"She coulden' hev foun' *that* out, cuz Ah locked th' box sence then. She mus' be one of them brain-readers by nature, Ah rickon, an' she jes' reads me like a book!"

Never dreaming of the turbulence created in Sary's mind by her casual remark about dyspepsia and love, Mrs. Brewster took her chair at the table. Immediately after giving thanks, the host stood up to carve the roast. Then, to the surprise of all present, it was seen that the rancher had donned his second-best black coat and had taken the trouble to wear cuffs and a starched collar.

Trying to avoid Polly's eyes Mrs. Brewster met the gaze of Anne. But the two understood

and exchanged a fleeting glance of satisfaction and approval.

"Well, girls, did you visit Rainbow Cliffs—and how did you like them?" asked Mr. Brewster, having finished the carving.

"Oh, they are just wonderful!" declared Eleanor.

"I hear they are very valuable," remarked Barbara.

Mr. Brewster sent her a sharp glance and then frowned at Polly. "Ah never give that a thought. There they've stood for ages before Sam Brewster saw them, and Ah reckon there they'll stand for ages after Sam Brewster is dead and forgotten!"

"Not if I can coax Polly to sell enough of the loose stones to buy an automobile and go off to school!" said Eleanor, emphatically.

An annoyed look from Mr. Brewster and a surprised one from Mrs. Brewster made Anne and Polly feel uncomfortable at Eleanor's lack of tact. But the hostess was equal to the situation.

"Polly, who do you think came to the kitchen door to ask for you while you were at the cliffs, this morning?"

"Here—to ask for me, Mah—mother!" exclaimed Polly, in surprise.

"Yes, and she felt deeply offended because you had not asked for her health or even sent word to her by Jeb—and she so lonely after her accident, too!" Mrs. Brewster managed to express great pathos with her words.

"Oh, my darling Noddy! Mother, did she come to the door?" laughed Polly, sympathetic tears starting in her eyes at the picture called up by her mother.

"Yes, and she said it was simply inexcusable in you. She was willing to carry you anywhere you wished to go, but now she will disown you forever, unless you make peace with her, this afternoon," said Mrs. Brewster, smiling as she saw how she had succeeded in her effort to change the thoughts and conversation of her family.

"And Jeb said he had the horses ready for you girls as soon as you wanted to try them out," added Mr. Brewster.

Dinner was dispatched hastily after this announcement, and the girls ran to don their habits. All idea of Barbara's wiring for return-ticket money that day was forgotten as they went gayly towards the corral to try out different horses.

The entire afternoon was given over to exciting sport, as the girls, and even Mrs. Brewster, tried to outride each other about the great en-

closure. Polly made Noddy happy by mounting her silky little back and whispering fond nothings in the long ears. Anne was pleased to find her Chicago friends could ride so well on the restive western horses, and both Chicago girls were surprised to find what a magnificent rider Mrs. Brewster was. She was slowly rising in their private opinions of her.

During the following days, the girls took short rides to points of interest in Bear Forks Valley and nearby mountains. And then came Sunday. Barbara had not openly declared her satisfaction with the ranch or time spent with its people, the past week, but neither had any one heard a hint of her returning to Chicago. In fact, so much had been crowded in the days just gone by, that no moment had been found in which to *think* of returning home. The trunks had not been opened since the habits had been removed, as there was no need for changes of costumes, and the traveling bags had contained all the girls needed for a few days.

The ranchers of the Rocky Mountains are so strict about observing the Sabbath Day, that everything pleasurable, or in the form of work, has to end at twelve o'clock Saturday night. Every one goes to "meetin' " on Sundays, some driving a dis-

tance of twenty miles, or more. Once a month, an ordained preacher crosses the Flat Top Mountains to hold a regular service, and on other Sundays the leading ranchers read the Bible and conduct prayers.

The weather throughout summer in this section of Colorado is generally fine and clear. Should a heavy thunder storm arise, it as quickly passes over again. The nights are cool and dewy and the days glorious and exhilarating. Hence one has no dread of foggy or prolonged rainy days as in the East.

The plan of dining under the trees had proved a good one, and as the weather remained fair, no meals had to be eaten in the kitchen since that first day.

When the family gathered about the table that Sunday morning, they all seemed cheerful and animated, but Mr. Brewster had not yet made his appearance.

"Has Mr. Brewster had breakfast so soon?" asked Anne.

"No, he has not come out yet; he is reading the Sunday lesson for his class in School," replied Mrs. Brewster.

"Sunday School! Do you go? Where is the church?" asked Eleanor, wonderingly.

"Down at Bear Forks School-house. We use it for church, as well as for other important purposes, besides day-school," Mrs. Brewster replied, smilingly.

Soon after the girls appeared at table, Mr. Brewster came out. He said good morning in a very sedate manner that surprised the girls who were not accustomed to his Sunday manners.

That morning he gave a lengthy prayer of thanks that was meant to cover the past week, but once he had concluded grace, he turned to his wife.

"Mary, I'm sure I smelled the omelette scorching."

Mrs. Brewster hurried to the kitchen where she found the eggs burning and the room filled with horrid smoke. Sary was scolding at a great rate, but she never used a *profane* word because it was wicked.

"Why, Sary, how did you happen to let the eggs burn?"

"How come? Well, I'll tell you-all! Mr. Brewster handed me a printed prayer to learn, and I was looking for my specs in my box when it happened! That's all the good that prayer did me!"

Mrs. Brewster kept a straight face and said:

"Well, never mind, Sary. We'll soon have another omelette ready."

"Not on Sunday! I made one, and that was a sin, ez you kin see by the way it burnt. I does no more cookin' or there'll be extra sin to wipe out. Thar's bread and jam and coffee—enough fer any one to git along on fer a few hours."

Mrs. Brewster knew her husband, however, so she said nothing to Sary, but hurriedly whipped up another omelette and fried it to a delicate brown. This she carried out to serve. At the kitchen door she turned to speak to the help.

"Sary, bring out the bread and jam, will you?"

Sary had filled a deep dish with dry cereal and held it in one hand. She took up the coffee-pot with the other and ran to get out of the screen-door which had been flung open by her mistress. But the door slammed to sooner than Sary had calculated and struck the coffee-pot in its violent closing, throwing it upon the floor.

"Consarn th' pesky door! Now thar hain't nuthin' on arth fer Mr. Brewster to give thanks fer but jes' toast and jam. Ah cain't bile another pot of coffee on Sunday!" Sary stood contemplating the disaster until Mrs. Brewster called out:

"Sary, will you bring that bread and jam?"

The help brought the desired edibles and explained about the coffee. Eleanor laughed out loud, but Anne kicked her warningly under the table.

Mr. Brewster turned to explain to his guests. "Ranchers never work on the Sabbath. The less we cook the better it is, for we do penance to our material desire for food. I have never been so severe as to forbid cooked food on my table, but many of the families do. This morning, however, we are compelled to sacrifice our weaknesses to Sary's ways."

So the bread and jam was eaten with the omelette, to the accompaniment of cold water, and then the master prepared to leave the table.

"Girls, don't waste much time fussing with your toilette; we are behind time as it is."

"Did you expect us to go to church?" gasped Barbara.

"Certainly. Everybody goes," returned Mr. Brewster, equally surprised at such a question.

"Why, we haven't unpacked any clothes for church."

"That doesn't matter. The Lord doesn't judge according to dress. If your heart is clean it is all He wants," replied Mr. Brewster, walking away towards the house.

The girls looked at each other in amazement.

"What shall we do, Anne? I won't go in this old rag!" declared Barbara.

"Don't drag me into the argument, Bob. You hate going to church and there's no use trying to pretend it is your dress that keeps you away."

"Would Eleanor care to go with us?" asked Mrs. Brewster.

"Is Polly going?" countered Eleanor.

"Oh, yes, I always go," said Polly.

"We-el, I don't know, Poll. I'll go next Sunday but I am taken by surprise this week. I'll stay home with Bob, I guess."

"Very well, then, I'll tell Mr. Brewster to omit the extra seat in the wagon," and Mrs. Brewster hurried away to dress.

"What shall we do all morning?" asked Eleanor the moment the ranch-wagon was out of sight.

"We might unpack a few things we need, and arrange the trunks so mine can be sent back home without giving you any trouble about yours," suggested Barbara.

"That's a good plan. And a good day to do it in, too," laughed Eleanor.

"I think it is ridiculous—the way they go on

about the Sabbath! I suppose they would be dreadfully shocked if they knew we were about to unpack our trunks!" said Barbara, sneeringly.

Time passed quickly in sorting out the numerous items in the seven trunks, and the girls felt famished before they were done. The articles they wished to have out for use were piled up on the grass outside the barn, and it looked a formidable heap when all was ready to leave the barn.

"Goodness me! We'll have to make a dozen trips to the house with all this!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"We'll carry all we can pile up this first trip, and then have luncheon. Afterward we will carry the rest over," said Barbara.

The clothing seemed so light that they kept piling up the articles until they could hardly see from under the mountain of lingerie and accessories. But they both found how heavy the light summer clothes could be, when one's arms were extended unnaturally to hold up so much finery.

They finally reached the porch and threw the things into rustic chairs, while they sat down to cool off in the breeze.

"Now, you carry the clothes to the bedroom,

Bob, while I hunt in the kitchen for something to eat," remarked Eleanor, after a time.

These important duties attended to, the girls were about to go to the barn for a second load of clothing when the ranch-wagon drove up to the steps. The family got out and Jeb drove on to the barn.

"What's this on the grass?" asked Mr. Brewster, stooping to pick up a silk stocking.

"That's Barbara's, I think," said Anne, instantly divining the cause of its being there.

Then Jeb came running back to the house with news. "Ah found th' trunks is b'en opened by some one, an' all th' finery is piled on the grass outside th' barn. What hes happened, Ah want to know."

Luckily Mrs. Brewster heard his remark and Mr. Brewster had no time to speak before she caught Anne's hand, and led Jeb back to the barn. Shortly thereafter, the three returned laden with everything ever known in a lady's wardrobe.

"Mary, you have broken the commandments to-day!" said Mr. Brewster, overcoming a keen desire to laugh at his wife.

"Maybe, Sam, but I strengthened another, called the 'Golden Rule'—I certainly did unto

them what I want some one to do for mine in case of need. Poor girls!"

Sary happened to be coming from the kitchen with the early supper dishes in her hands. She saw Jeb with dainty silk lingerie almost covering his head, and she heard Mr. and Mrs. Brewster's words. It was too much!

She continued on her way, but once she reached the table she thumped the dishes down to vent her spite. "To think them city gals kin wind Jeb about their fingers like that! On a Sunday, too! Ah wonder hain't he got no respeck fer me an' the Brewster women, that he allows them snippy misses to git him to carry underwear—him what's an unmarried man, at that!"

While the family sat at table enjoying the quiet Sunday evening, Sary took advantage of their interesting discourse to slip away from the kitchen and examine the beautiful lace-trimmed apparel spread out upon the great bed in the guest-room.

"Laws me! Ef it hain't like a bridal outfit. Ef Ah ever hed hed th' chanst t' put on ennything like-es-that, I'd not have hed t'marry a poor rancher like Bill. Ah could have hed my pick of the men at Oak Crick!"

Sary sighed with pity at her own limitations in life, and then crept back to her kitchen planning

how she could manage to get one of the girls to present her with some of the bridal finery. Thus pondering the problem, she sat down opposite Jeb and entertained him, as he ate his Sunday supper of pork and beans.

CHAPTER X

THE DANCE AT BEAR FORKS

THE interesting events which crowded each other, day after day, in this western life, so engrossed the girls that Bob forgot her vow to send a telegram for return money to Chicago. She even forgot to write to Mrs. Maynard at Newport, or to any of her society friends, until Anne reminded her of a duty to her parents.

Tuesday following their first Sunday at Pebbly Pit, a rancher's wife called just before noon, to deliver invitations.

"Ah heer'd tell how you-all had comp'ny this summer?" were the words with which she greeted Mrs. Brewster.

"Yes, a few young people. Will you be seated, Mrs. Halsey?" said Mrs. Brewster, placing a chair on the vine-shaded porch.

"Ah come t' ast you-all—say, you, Sally, stop pickin' them flowers! Mis' Brewster'll lick yuh!"

The visitor interrupted herself to shout at her little girl who proved to be a naughty one.

"Ez Ah was sayin', Ah come t' leave an invite fer th' hop at Bear Forks. We-all is glad t' see Anne Stewart, which was a school-teacher some time back, an' it was fit t' celebrate her friendship, in some way. Don't cha think a dance jes' th' thing?" As the visitor spoke she rocked violently back and forth.

"I'm sorry my visitors are not here to thank you themselves, but I feel sure they will be delighted to attend the dance," replied Mrs. Brewster, shaking her head rebukingly at the small boy who stood on the rockers of his mother's chair, and gripped hold of the back, and so was roughly swayed back and forth with the rocking.

"See har, yuh Jim Henderson Halsey—git down from thar! Ef Ah ketch yuh, Ah'll skin yer face fer the hop—that Ah will!" threatened the mother, trying to reach her young hopeful.

But Jim Henderson Halsey knew from dire experiences just what to expect did his mother succeed in catching him, so he dodged and ran away.

"Did you-all say the gals would be in shortly?" asked the caller.

"No, I said they were *not* in. They are at the corral this morning."

"Laws me! What a place t' spend th' mornin'. Ah reckon they'll be along any time, then."

"They left here just before you came and they are practicing on our western horses before taking any long trips," explained Mrs. Brewster, looking regretfully at the flower-beds where the two willful children were destroying the fruits of her planting.

Mrs. Halsey followed her hostess's glance and jumped up. "Ef yuh two varmints don't quit that, an' come right t' me, Ah'll—Ah'll shet yuh up in a boogy-hole!" shrilled the irate mother.

Sary heard the familiar voice and instantly ran from the kitchen to assist in entertaining the morning visitor. The two bad youngsters, left to their own devices, began throwing the whitewashed stones that encircled Mrs. Brewster's roundels.

"How-dy, Miss Halsey?" was Sary's greeting, her large hand extended in cordial comradeship.

"Oh, it's Sary Dodd! How-dee, Sary? Ah recommember now that you-all come t' live wid Miss Brewster. How'd you-all like th' place?"

The visitor's frankness lost none of its curiosity as she eagerly waited to hear all about the Brew-

ster family with the mistress still present, but ignored.

Sary was in her glory and made the most of it. She had just reached the point where she intended asking the "gossip" to stop to have dinner, when a crash interrupted the enlivening Yellow Jacket Pass conversation.

"Sary, run and see what those children have done!" cried Mrs. Brewster, mentally thanking her stars for the timely intervention.

Soon the ladies heard Jim Henderson Halsey bawling loudly, and his sister backing away from the buttery while she continued making faces at the angry help. The little girl's protruded tongue made Sary rush at her with uplifted palm, but both youngsters were so accustomed to dodging these attacks, that they reached the haven of Mrs. Halsey's presence without a painful encounter.

"The ol' thing shook me till my teeth rattled!" wailed Jim Henderson, etc.

"Sarves yuh right! What cha be'n up t', any way?" retorted Mrs. Halsey, the hope of dinner still lingering, but growing dim as Sary did not return.

Fortunately, for the general peace of all concerned, Mr. Brewster drove up to the porch, on

his way to Oak Creek. His wife's beseeching look appealed to him understandingly.

"Good morning, Mrs. Halsey. Ah hear you-all are inviting folks to the dance at the school house. Want me to give you a lift to Jamison's ranch—he hasn't been invited yet!"

"Why, Ah figgered goin' thar after dinner. Be you-all goin' off before yuh eat?"

"Ah am not sure when we will have dinner today, the young ladies are so engaged with riding, you see."

The moment the Halsey scions heard mention of "dinner" they clung to their mother's skirts and whined: "We-all wanta stay to dinnerr! Don't cha go widdout dinnerr!"

"Why not give the children some cake, mother, and then Mrs. Halsey can have a bite with Jamison. He can lift her on to the next ranch, too," suggested Mr. Brewster.

Mrs. Brewster instantly acquiesced and ran to cut three generous triangles of cake, while her husband came up and lifted Sally up into the deep wagon. Before any of the Halsey family could protest, he had turned, lifted Jim Henderson up beside his sister and then asked the visitor if he could help her up to the seat.

The cake was distributed, and the vexed but vanquished morning caller jabbed a hat-pin through her rusty toque and pulled her jet-trimmed shoulder cape tightly over her back, before bowing haughtily to Mrs. Brewster.

Not until the ranch-wagon turned the edge of Rainbow Cliffs did Mrs. Brewster permit herself to leave the post of watching and slump down into the porch rocker with a sigh of gratitude.

Half an hour later the sound of wheels caused her to spring up in dread, but her husband's cheery laugh relieved her fears.

"Ah saw your difficulty and did the only sensible thing; but we-all must keep this trick a secret. If Sary gets hold of it, my reputation in Bear Forks, or Yellow Jacket Pass, is gone," confided Sam Brewster to his wife, as he glanced fearfully about for Sary.

The horn for dinner sounded shortly after the master's return and, at the table, the girls were told of the visitor and her invitation to the dance, but no word of her form of departure was mentioned.

"It's lucky we have evening-dresses," remarked Barbara.

"Do folks dress up at these parties?" asked Eleanor.

"I should say we do!" declared Polly.

Mrs. Brewster and Anne were talking in low tones and did not hear the question and answer, so they did not explain what Polly meant by "dressing up."

The days intervening between the Tuesday and the Friday set down for the hop passed quickly. Polly and her mother washed and renovated the dotted swiss dress made for the school-commencement, and to Polly's delight Anne added a blue sash and hair ribbons.

Anne had a simple flowered-silk gown she proposed wearing. And the city girls had elaborate dresses—Barbara's very much in the latest mode and Eleanor's flounced and furbelowed, but modestly high in the neck as became a girl not yet "out."

Sary had bewailed her fate the day preceding the eventful one. Eleanor pacified her by presenting her with a net-lace collar to enliven her rusty black alpaca.

An early supper was planned, as the ride to Bear Forks school would take more than an hour, and every one wanted to be there for the grand march. For several hours before supper-time, Barbara locked herself in the bed-room and began her toilette. She dressed her hair, massaged,

and rouged and penciled her eyebrows, until she quite tired herself out.

Eleanor and Anne rapped again and again for admission, but Barbara was obdurate about her right of possession. When she finally opened the door for her room-mates, they stared at her in amused surprise.

"Your hair looks all sizzly, Bob," said Eleanor.

"Oh, Bob, remove some of that carmine from your lips!" advised Anne.

"Why?" demanded Barbara.

"Too much of it, that's all!" giggled Eleanor.

But Anne and Eleanor had their own toilettes to make and paid no further attention to Barbara. She managed to remove some of the carmine, and pat down her hair, but she could not do things as the French maid generally did them to add to her beauty.

Feeling dissatisfied with her appearance made Barbara irritable, but she remained in the room criticizing everything the two other girls did or said. Then just before the horn sounded for supper, a knock came at the door.

"Come in!" called Anne, buttoning her white suede boots.

" 'S onny me. Ah jes' wanta ast you-all ef it is right in city sassiety, fur a widder of six months'

standin' t' go t' a party whar onny old frien's will be. Thar won't be no sky-larkin' er high-jinks, yo' know!"

Sary's anxious tone expressed her eagerness for a favorable reply to her query on widowhood. Eleanor looked at Anne to answer, so she took the initiative.

"Certainly, Sary—come right along and enjoy yourself."

Barbara was shocked. "The help's not going—surely!"

"Humph! Miss Halsey ast me afore she mentioned you-all!" snapped Sary, quite able to defend herself against Barbara's pride.

"Oh, Bob doesn't mean it that way, Sary," said Eleanor, giving her sister a backward kick for silence.

"Of course not! Bob means that your mourning might prevent your attending the dance. But seeing we are all old friends from ranches round about, it will be like meeting your family," added Anne, the pacifist.

"Wall, then, Ah'll go," sighed Sary, as if loath to join a merry throng. "But Ah hez t' have a smitch of somethin' like-ez-how Miss Bob hez fer her shoulders, cuz my neck's gettin' scrawny now."

Barbara had draped chiffon over her neck and dress, and at Sary's request, she turned angrily. "The very idea! This chiffon is two dollars a yard!"

"I've got the very thing you need, Sary. You can wear second mourning now, I suppose!" exclaimed Eleanor, sending a look at her sister.

She hurried to the closet and took a long flat box from the upper shelf. As she carried it over to Sary, Barbara stared.

"Eleanor Maynard! *What* are you giving her?"

"Something I never will need this summer, and Sary can use it very nicely to furbish up that black dress."

Sary was too excited to wait and open the box in her own room, so she tore off the paper at once. A lovely rainbow-tinted chiffon scarf lay revealed, the predominating colors being violet.

"Ah-h-h! Ah'm clean locoed, Miss Nolla! Not a soul'll ever know that rusty black alpacky is th' same dress Miss Pearson mourned her husband in fer five years before Ah got it given me!"

"What nonsense! As if that dainty scarf will hide your outlandish dress and mountainous figure!" came insultingly from Barbara.

But nothing could spoil the joy of possessing such a heavenly wisp of angel's robe as that scarf seemed to be to Sary. She was deaf to all else, as she tenderly hugged the box to her ample bosom and backed from the room.

When all were seated about the table, which was spread in the living room for that night, Mr. Brewster smiled at Polly in her gala attire. Anne looked sweet and lovely in her simple dress, but the host could not quite make out the style the city girls wore. He was not accustomed to boudoir gowns of filmy lace and thin silk, and he thought they were a new style of party dress. Had he known *what* Barbara proposed wearing, he would have asked her to remain at home.

As Sary passed the bread to Eleanor she leaned over and beamed: "Miss Nolla, Ah tried that on, an' you-all woulden' know me! Ah'm shore he'll pick me fer a lanciers! Mebbe that scarf'll give him spine enough to speak!"

"Sary, I know right well he will!" declared Eleanor, not dreaming the mischief she wrought in Sary's soul at that.

Sary pranced back to the kitchen, but her flighty thoughts were swinging corners in the quadrille with Jeb, and the fried potatoes were

gracefully shot into the coal-scuttle as the pan was waved aloft in imitation of dancers she had envied in days gone by.

"Sary, hurry with the coffee-pot, please!" called Polly.

And Sary grabbed up the stone jug of vinegar from the back of the stove where she had placed it, and ran in to pour the beverage into cups. The combined cries of every one at the table failed to bring her to her senses, so Mrs. Brewster told her to go quickly and dress for the dance.

Then wagon wheels sounded on the gravel road and Jeb yelled: "Air you-all ready?"

Sary gave a last lingering look in the tiny mirror over her combination wash-stand, and realized what charms she had when rainbow chiffon adorned her person. She then snuffed out the tiny lamp-wick and hurried forth to meet her fate.

Jeb was dressed regardless of all censorship. A great flaming peony in his coat-lapel reflected its scarlet on his ruddy face. His tie was a riot of colors and detracted somewhat from his purple socks and tan shoes. He wore a figured near-silk vest won at an Oak Creek raffle, and large checked trousers said to be the latest fashion some years back, when he squandered his money on

them. With his face scoured until it shone, and his hair greased so that it was plastered down neatly, Jeb felt he could woo and win the prettiest gal in the country-side. He forgot there was a "female widow" about.

The Brewster party reached the school-house later than was their wont, and the cloak-room was well-filled with ranchers' wives and daughters all waiting to pass judgment on the strangers from Pebbly Pit.

Mrs. Brewster and Polly entered first, shaking hands with friends and acquaintances. Anne followed smiling benignly on all. Barbara came next, casting disdainful looks at the ordinary women she found present. Eleanor delighted in the novel experience and was anxious to meet them all.

Once in the small room, the new-comers began to remove their dust-coats and wraps. The ranchers' parties then went out to make room. Barbara turned to Anne and whispered:

"Where can I find the maid?"

"Maid! We haven't one here, you know."

"No maid to help me? Goodness, what shall I do?"

"You're supposed to dress at home; besides, these people do not powder or rouge, so they need

no mirror or maid, you see," explained Eleanor, taking delight in shocking Barbara.

"Then I suppose I will have to go out without a look at myself. Do I look all right to you, Anne?"

As she spoke, Barbara dropped her evening cloak from her shoulders and pivoted for Anne's benefit. Her gown of rose-pink net, trimmed with elaborate gold embroidery, was extremely décolleté, with narrow gold bands over the shoulders performing the double duty as sleeves and to hold the lower section of the dress up in place!

Barbara turned slowly and attracted the attention of Mrs. Brewster, Polly, and a few strangers lagging behind to watch the visitors. Just then Sary hurried in from the dance-hall. She gasped at the sight before her and quickly came to the rescue.

"Shet yer eyes—every one! The poor dear! Ah'll cover her up whiles some one finds her basque!" And Sary caught up Mrs. Halsey's jet-trimmed cape and wound it quickly about Barbara's bare neck and shoulders.

"Child, how come yuh t' fergit the basque? Er what hez happened to it?" cried Sary, sympathetically, while Barbara struggled vainly to

wrench herself free from the ill-smelling wrap that generally hung in Halsey's kitchen.

"Ah hev it! Polly, git the box Nolla gave me. Ah'll let Miss Bob wear my scarf!"

This meant supreme sacrifice for Sary, but she willingly offered the one and only treasure to serve a betrayed friend. Still she was at a loss to understand where that basque could be!

Finally Barbara squirmed free and Mrs. Brewster managed to say:

"Sary, Bob has on one of her most modern evening gowns. They are made without tops, you know!"

Sary gasped and suddenly collapsed upon the chair. Her strained expression, as she took a covert look at the dress, spoke volumes.

"Glory be, Miss Brewster," whispered Sary, hoarsely. "You-all don' mean it fer trut', do yuh?"

"Yes, Sary, it is a very expensive and stylish robe."

"An' kin you-all let her march brazen-like, like that, in front of the men!" shrilled Sary, holding both wide hands over her heart.

"I never heard or dreamed there was such ignorance in the world, as I have found in Colo-

rado!" now flared Barbara, turning and leaving the cloak-room.

Sary waited but a second, then she cried, "Ah cain't 'low Jeb t' see sech sights—an' he a good bachelor-man!"

Sary rushed out to spare her prey any shocks, and the other members of the party gazed at each other doubtfully.

"Oh, well, it's not our funeral, Polly!" said Eleanor.

"Shall we join the dancers?" asked Anne.

"Yes, but I fear Bob will be ostracized," said Mrs. Brewster.

"Serve her right! Anne and I told her not to dress like that, but she *would,* you know. She wanted to show folks the style," explained Eleanor, taking silent Polly by the arm and leading her out to the main hall.

As they left the cloak-room, the girls heard the fiddler shout: "Git yer pardners fer the Grand March!"

And from that time on to midnight, the three girls had the best fun ever. But poor Barbara stood near the cloak-room as isolated as the plague, for the ranchers dared not even look at a gown without a top, let alone dance with the doubtful thing.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE WILDERNESS

EACH day the four girls rode along various trails until, in the judgment of Jeb, they were practiced enough to take a longer ride in the mountains.

Polly had been urging Jeb to give a favorable opinion on their ability to stand a prolonged ride to the Flat Tops, but he was careful and practical and persisted in making them try a greater distance daily to finally harden them to a rough trail.

Then Jeb said he reckoned the girls could start for a real outing. Immediately, they planned where to go and what to see.

Polly outlined a trip that might take a whole day, so they would have to take food and kit for cooking purposes. Each girl would ride her favorite horse or burro and the extra burro, Choko, could carry the outfit.

Of course, Polly decided to ride Noddy, as the burro was well acquainted with her mistress's

ways and the mountains. Eleanor preferred a burro also, because, as she said comically, "if one falls from a burro's back it is not far to Mother Earth." The two other girls selected horses, sure-footed and trained for climbing.

On the morning chosen for the trip, Mrs. Brewster and Sary were up at day-break preparing the kit and packing the panniers. At breakfast, four eager girls, with wide sombreros on their heads, heavy mountain-shoes and leather puttees covering feet and limbs, talked of the great adventures they were about to meet with.

Sam Brewster laughed at their wild imaginings and said: "Ah shouldn't wonder but what you-all will find a second 'Aladdin's Lamp' hiding place. Just think of the fun to be had by rubbing the Lamp and wishing for things!"

Then Jeb brought the mounts from the barn and Sary helped him strap the panniers and kit to Choko. Just as they were ready to start, Sary flew out with a paper package carefully held.

"Polly, Ah made a s'prise fer you-all, but don't let Choko roll in it er run away, er my work will go fer nuthin'."

"Don't worry about Choko, Sary, he's too trustworthy to serve us such a trick," bragged Polly, petting the burro on the head.

"Wall, then, see thet it hain't shooken up too much er gittin' mashed under the ax," were the parting words from Sary, as she shifted the short ax, which is an important item in every outfit.

It was a wonderful summer day—the kind that makes one feel happy in mere living, and the anticipation of wonders to come added a zest to the outing for the girls.

They left the trail leading from Pebbly Pit and picked up the rough mountain trail at the Forks, Barbara and Eleanor exclaiming constantly at the gorgeous wild flowers growing wherever the roots could find lodgment.

"I never saw such columbines! Four times the size of ours in the East," cried Eleanor.

"And those marvelous orange-colored blossoms! They look like a rare exotic, with their huge clusters and flaunting colors!" exclaimed Barbara.

"If you girls think these are so beautiful, just wait till we reach the 'bottoms'—there you will see size and color enough to make you wonder if you accidentally struck Paradise," said Anne.

"And our ferns and mosses, girls! You never saw such specimen, elsewhere," added Polly, churking to Choko to hurry on.

"Polly, why did Jeb over-load that poor little

burro?" now asked Barbara, having lost her momentary interest in flora.

"Choko isn't over-loaded at all. Of course it looks as if he had a great load to carry, but pans and woolen blankets look more than they weigh, you see. The heaviest thing he carries is my ax, I reckon."

"Ax! What do you want of an ax?" wondered Barbara.

"Can't tell how cold it may be up on the mountain-top, so I brought the sheath-knife, ax, rifle, and other things in case we get the tail-end of a blizzard."

"And the blankets in case we get lost and need to camp out all night," added Anne, teasingly, seeing the city girls' fears.

"You can't really mean it, Anne! Surely we won't lose our way, and as for a blizzard! Well, it is July," laughed Barbara.

"It wouldn't be the first time we ran into a blizzard in July," commented Polly.

"But how is it possible, girl alive!" cried Barbara.

"Possible enough on the Flat Tops. The merest rag of a cloud finds an excuse to carry snow from the peaks. The wonder will be if we come away without seeing snow fall."

"Oh, Polly, how thrilling!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"Once when father and I rode over this same trail to find a trapper who had pelts for sale, we got caught in a blizzard. We got the pelts but we also got the storm, and lucky for us that we had the pelts first.

"I never had experienced a real mountain storm, but father had, so he showed me what to do. I think I would know now just what to do in case of another surprise."

"Bu-r-r-r! Let's hope you won't have to practice on us," laughed Eleanor, pretending to shiver.

"Stop your nonsense, Nolla! I don't want to think of such dreadful things," cried Barbara.

"And I want to hear about how the pelts saved her life," added Anne.

"It's real interesting, Bob, so let me tell them," asked Polly, and receiving no unfavorable word or look, she proceeded:

"It was the Fourth of July, and of course no one would start on a ride wearing a fur-lined coat, so father and I had on our summer clothes.

"After riding along Top Notch Trail for a time, we met the trapper and bargained for the furs, then started back by a new trail he told us of. It led past Pagoda Peak, and just as we got to the base of the peak and discovered the

down-trail, the blizzard came swooping upon us without warning.

"Father and I tried to keep going, but the gale traveled too fast and blew in whirling eddies, so we got the pelts out of the bundle, and wrapped ourselves in the largest ones. The smaller ones we used for our feet. Father found two great bear-skins and covered the horse—that acted as a shield on one side from the storm—the other horses stood in front and back of us, making three sides protected.

"Father then made me creep with him to the refuge made by the three horses and there we remained. The horses stood perfectly still throughout the blizzard, which lasted only an hour at most, and the steam they exuded from their bodies kept us quite warm as we crouched under them.

"When the storm blew over, we dug a way out and removed the horse blankets and fur pelts from the horses. Then we rolled our own coverings into the bundle and started on down-trail. But the floods of melting snow caused wash-outs and it was risky going. When we reached the first Park never a sign of snow was there, and the only result of that mountain blizzard was an added flood of water pouring down the gulleys to the bottoms and valley."

"Oh, Polly, what an interesting book your adventures would make!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"I'd like to write it down as you tell it, Polly, and we can surely find a publisher for it," added Anne, eagerly.

"Really! Oh, how I'd love to tell such a story!" said Polly, all enthusiasm.

"We'll try it as soon as we get back to-night!" promised Anne.

The going was easy, so Polly told of other adventures: of the trip to Buffalo Park when a bear chased them; of her meeting with Old Montresor, the gold-seeker of Grizzly Slide and his pitiful story; of the nights spent out on the mountains, watching beside a dying camp-fire, or listening to the call of the moose to his mate on a moonlit night; of the wonderful sport fishing in trout-filled streams, or seeking gorgeous flora and strange fauna on the peaks, and again photographing wild beasts and birds that never showed a fear of her as she traversed their domains. The three girls were spell-bound at her vivid descriptions and Anne sighed with desire to put it all down on paper for future publication.

"Montresor's Mine is in this mountain that I want to show you to-day. He was a dear old man who lived a solitary life in a cabin near Buffalo

Park. Patsy, his dog, was his only companion. But he died and left me his mine—that we never found again," sighed Polly.

"Oh, Polly! Tell us the story!" chorused the girls.

Polly laughed: "It isn't a story, 'cause there never was a climax as real stories have to have, you know. But I'll tell you how I met Mr. Montresor. I was out with Noddy, one day, and we traveled farther than usual.

"In leaving a bad trail to take a good one, I met the gray-haired man slowly riding up. An Irish terrier ran back of his horse, sniffing, sniffing, and whining as if distracted. I was so surprised at the dog's actions that I stopped to ask the man what ailed him.

" 'Ah, my child, Patsy is seeking for my lost mine!'

" 'Your lost mine!' I gasped, for I had never heard of him or his mine, although folks said there was a rich vein of gold somewhere in the mountain.

*" 'Yes, child, I am the unfortunate Montresor. Haven't you heard of my great loss?'

"I thought the poor man was foolish, so I

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* This is a true incident.

humored him by saying, 'No, sir, I never did. Won't you tell me about it?'

"Then he told me the story. He had been an old prospector in the Klondike, but not a successful one, as he was too honest. On his return from Alaska, he had to stop in Denver and work for his fare back to the East where he came from. Being a splendid engineer as well as a mineralogist, he found a place with a crew of mining engineers about to inspect Pagoda Peak section and Lost Lake district. He came with them.

"After he had been in these mountains for a time, he was so certain of finding gold that he remained when the rest of the crew went back to Denver. After two years of patient digging and prospecting he took a new trail that was later found to be Red Man's Trail, seldom traveled, as it was such dangerous and hard going.

"He was climbing along an awful place where the ledge hung over a chasm, when he spied a small yellow nugget on the ground. He examined it and found it to be fine red-gold. Upon looking about, he found a few more, but there seemed to be no sign of gold in the ledge or in the rocks about him. Still he staked out a claim on the spot in hopes of later finding gold hidden in the ground.

"He hobbled his horse and made a good circuit of the place and then discovered that the opposite ledge of the abyss towered up hundreds of feet higher than the one he was on. That gave him an idea.

"He rode the horse carefully along his ledge until he reached a slope where both ledges met an up-grade of mountain-side. Leaving the lower ledge and back-trailing on the higher one, he stopped opposite the place where he had found the nuggets. He dismounted, sought carefully about, and to his joy found more nuggets exactly like the ones picked up on the opposite lower side.

"He took the pick from the saddle and worked at the wall facing him, and discovered a rich lode running straight in through the solid rock. He was so excited that he started off without staking a claim or otherwise marking the place. But he soon remembered and went back. He made out a correct claim and fastened it to a tree, then piled up the necessary heaps of stone with his stakes in the middle. Doing all he could think of to legally hold the right to mine the ore, he started back along the dangerous ledge. It was so dark by this time, that he could not find the way he came, and knowing it was almost impassable, he permitted the horse to choose a way out by going

up the mountain-side, and so he finally reached the summit. Here he camped for the night and early in the morning he kept on till he struck Top Notch Trail, but so circuitous had been the route that he never could describe the pathway his horse took.

"Unfortunately, he had left Patsy home that day to guard supplies in the cabin, and he did not return there at once, thinking it wiser to first file his claims in Oak Creek. The clerk asked for section-corners or distances from the nearest surveyor's blaze, but Montresor had not found any.

"It was a question whether the claim would be legal, but the worried old man refused to give full details of the spot, as he feared the claim would be jumped, and he purposed going back again to make a survey for himself.

"On his way to the cabin for Patsy, a dreadful storm came over the mountains and lasted for three days. Snow, hail and wind blew down the sides until it seemed as if winter had come in full blast. Of course, no one would attempt climbing in that storm and Montresor had to remain in his cabin for the blizzard to pass.

"When he was able to travel again, he took Patsy to help find the place, but the rain had washed away all scent for the dog. After a

tortuous climb on the trail, made ten-fold worse by the down timber and wash-outs, Montresor discovered land-marks and knew he was on the right pathway.

"However, he could see no ravine or ledges, and after hunting day after day, without locating a spot that resembled his claim, he well-nigh caved in. There was no gully, no ledge, no wall of rock with fresh-picked vein of gold showing in its face! In fact, so much rock and earth and trees had been washed down from Top Notch Trail during the great storm that the whole area he had previously covered had changed form and appearances.

"The poor man then tried to find his claim by following Top Notch Trail and coming down from the summit, but he was taken ill and laid up in his cabin for a long time.

"I rode up to see him whenever I could, and father wanted him to have some one stay with him, but the old man would not. Patsy was his only nurse. The ranchers laughed and said he was luny over gold, and that he never had seen any. Still there was the ore to cause wonderment, until a miner declared it was some the old man had left in his kit from Klondike. The report

that he was trying to sell a claim that never existed, made folks shun him even when they heard he was sick.

"Cold weather was coming on and mother would not let me risk the long ride to his cabin so often, but one warm Saturday I packed supplies and rode Noddy up there. I found the poor man unconscious. Patsy stood by the bunk licking the limp hand. I looked about but no food or drink could I see. I lifted his gray head and tried to make him sip water from my bottle, but he merely opened his eyes and smiled.

"He tried to take something from under his head and I helped him. I found a scrawl saying, 'Look on Patsy's collar.'

"He tried to mumble and I stooped low but he relaxed suddenly and seemed to shrink. I felt his heart but it was still. I tried his eyes and they were sightless. Patsy sent up a heartrending wail and crawled over behind his master's gun and knapsack, so I knew my old friend was dead.

"I removed the paper from Patsy's collar and saw my name on it. Upon opening it, I found the dear man had left me all his interests in the claim filed at Oak Creek offices. I tried to coax Patsy to come with me, but he would not desert

his master. Then I placed water in a dish and gave the animal my food, but he would not eat or drink.

"I hurried home to tell father and he rode back that same evening, to arrange for the old man's burial. Jeb and John went with him, and the coroner from Oak Creek, who is a friend of ours.

"When they reached the cabin they found faithful Patsy stretched across his master's body dead also. So both old comrades were buried together, although the minister from over the mountain said it was a sin to place both in one grave. When John told me, I said I was glad the two could travel the same trail together, for Old Man Montresor had found Patsy his best friend for ten years.

"We found no clew to his eastern friends, and when the last will and testament of Ralph Montresor was filed at Oak Creek, every one laughed at us for believing the fairy-tale of a crazy man. But I never believed he was crazy, and I do believe he once discovered that gold-mine!"

"Oh, Polly!" wept Anne and Eleanor, deeply affected by the tale, but Barbara plaintively remarked, "Do talk of something cheerful!"

"All right, Bob, I'll tell you something that will cheer your woeful heart!" jeered Eleanor,

impatiently. "I'm going to take that Red Man's up-trail, soon, and rediscover the mine, then I'll give it to Polly for a present for her loyalty to Old Montresor!"

"Don't be silly! If you ever did find a gold-mine you'd hold on to it, fast enough!" retorted Barbara.

Eleanor winked at Polly and Polly smiled gratefully at her, but Anne broached another subject to spare the sisters an argument.

The horses had been jogging along a trail that now turned off to what looked like a wide plain.

"Here's the bridge I've been heading for," said Polly. "From here on, it's clear going to Lone Pine Blaze."

"Bridge! Do you call this a bridge," laughed Eleanor.

"It's a forest ranger's bridge. They build these over chasms and streams so horses and men can quickly reach any part of the forest when there is a fire. If they had to ford swift streams, or go round about, much time would be lost."

The bridge in question was made of loose tree-trunks thrown across the river and pegged down on either side where the ends rested upon the steep banks.

After crossing the log-bridge, Polly led the way

towards what seemed to be a veritable wilderness of forest. Giant pines thrust their green tops far above trees that would have been considered landmarks in the East, but were deemed quite ordinary in the West. Next in height to the commonly-sized pines came gigantic oaks and then the still shorter aspens and lodge-pole pine.

"You never intend breaking through that tangle of trees, I hope, Polly!" cried Barbara, who had never seen such a bewildering growth of forest in her life.

"No, not this time! I'm making for that pine that you can see way above all of the others. That is Lone Pine Blaze, because it bears the blaze that shows the way to the up-trail!"

Noddy must have been a frequent traveler to this tree for she knew exactly the way to go and when she came opposite the pine that bore the blaze, she stopped of her own accord.

"Now, wasn't that cute?" cried Eleanor, riding her burro directly behind Noddy.

Polly jumped from her burro's back and went over to Choko. She removed the ax from the pack and chopped a way through the slender undergrowth which had grown up that season.

"Yes, here's the blaze as plain as day! Any

of you girls want to read it for me?" laughed Polly.

The three curious girls jumped from their mounts and pushed a way over to the tree where they saw a queer mark made deep in the tree where the bark could not over-grow it.

"What does it say, Poll!" asked Eleanor.

"It means for us to turn to the left and follow the trail upwards!" said Polly, pointing to the signs.

"I should think the ranchers would put up sign-posts to guide travelers!" said Barbara.

"How long do you suppose a post would last in a mild little wind-storm that uproots trees and tosses them about like wisps of hay?" laughed Polly.

"Oh, Polly! You surely are making fun of us!" said Eleanor, doubtfully.

"No, indeed, she is not! In the three months' time I was at the Cobb School, I saw some terrific gales sweep over the country!" added Anne.

But sign-posts and wind-storms were forgotten for the time when the horses came out on a strange road they had to travel. The wilderness of pine forest had been left on the right after leaving Lone Pine, and the trail led down gradually to a

bottomland of brilliant green herbage. Directly over this emerald valley ran a corduroy roadway.

"There must have been a brook under this at one time!" stated Eleanor, finding the logs partly embedded in caked mud.

"No, this too, is built by our forest-rangers who help the timber jacks build these roads. You see, while frost holds good the heaviest tree trunks can be readily moved over icy swamp bottoms, but in the spring, when thaw and freshets begin, the bottoms are more like a marsh, or shallow lake, than anything else I know of. Then these corduroy roads are a make-shift for hard ground," explained Polly, while Noddy started to clip-clop over the firmly-set logs.

"Why don't the men wait for the next frost?" asked Barbara.

"Hoh! Don't you know the trees would be worthless if they were left for a season? Decay and mold or worms would destroy the finest wood. Besides, these logs, or poles, laid side by side in the mud, soon get to be as solid as a rock, for the mud, oozing up between the chinks of the logs, dries out and leaves them baked tight in the grooves."

Having heard the way this novel roadway was made, the girls took a lively interest in crossing

it. No more questions were asked until Polly reached the trail that led up through the forest. Then Eleanor spoke.

"Polly, you're sure you know the road?"

"We can't go very far wrong! If we keep to the trail we are bound to come out on the top—somewhere!" laughed Polly, giving Noddy her head in selecting a safe footing on the rough trail.

Eleanor, eager to show how well she could ride, forced her burro past Noddy while the latter was making a slight detour about a sage-brush. She turned partly around to laugh at Polly, when her burro made a sudden lunge away from the trail, and at the same time, a diamond-backed rattlesnake struck out from its coil, reaching at least two-thirds the full length of its body.

"Help! Save me!" screamed Eleanor, frantically, but the brave little burro knew how to carry his rider safely out of the way of the reptile.

Polly saw the snake coil for another strike at Barbara's horse, which had almost reached the place before Eleanor screamed. The whole occurrence was so unexpected and sudden that Barbara had not seen the swift flash of cinnamon-red and dark diamond-patterned rattler.

With great presence of mind, Polly instantly pulled Noddy up on a mound of ground just above

the reptile, and caught hold of a long supple branch of wood. In another instant she was whipping the snake until it could not tell from which direction the blows were descending—right, left, front or back! In a moment of indecision, the snake remained quiet and in that second Polly brought down her solid heel upon its flat head.

The other girls screamed and turned pale for they thought Polly had fallen from her burro upon the rattler—so quick had been her action. But the moment the daring girl looked up and laughed at them, they also jumped from their saddles and ran up to help.

Polly made sure the rattler was quite dead, then took a forked stick and held it up to view. It had beautiful diamond markings of dark-colors on cinnamon-red ground. The belly was of creamy white, and the tail had eight rattles attached to it by means of a peculiar fibrous ribbon. These rattles seemed to be of dry horny skin that made the buzz-sound when shaken. The head had been so crushed open that Polly could easily show the curious girls the poison-fangs which were hinged to the upper jaw.

"When a rattler intends to bite, its mouth grasps the object and these fangs drop down into

the flesh, puncturing tiny holes into which the fatal poison flows."

Polly described the action of the bite minutely, causing her hearers to shiver with dread. Seeing the effect her words had made, she laughed, adding, "A snake does not always bite clear! I mean, the least thing keeps his teeth from driving straight into the flesh, so that the poison bag cannot empty its fluid under the skin. It is often a loose or sidewise bite, so that much of the poison never enters the wound. That is why so many folks survive rattle-snake bites. If it went clean, and the poison bag was emptied under the skin,—pwhew!"

Polly whistled to denote her sense of the outcome of such a bite, and Barbara cried, "Oh, mercy, Polly! I feel so sick after hearing you, that I want to go back to Chicago!"

Anne laughed at Barbara's fears, saying, "We may not see another rattler all summer!"

"Anyway, Bob, you're perfectly safe while on a horse, for they can always tell when a rattler is near and they avoid it. A rattler will never go out of its own course to strike—only biting when one passes too near it for its safety!" said Polly.

"Well, that's some consolation, anyway!" sighed Eleanor.

"What do you want to do with this snake, Poll?" asked Anne, as the sisters climbed back into their saddles.

"Goodness me! What would she do with it, except to kick it over into the bushes!" cried Barbara.

"Polly is laughing! She thinks you are crazy, Anne!" added Eleanor, impatiently, for she was eager to proceed on the trail.

"Well, Polly, I think we will have it skinned and sent to Denver to be made into an odd hand-bag for your mother!" suggested Anne.

"Oh, Anne, how splendid! I wish I could find a snake skin!" cried Eleanor.

"Yes, Anne, I think mother will love that!" added Polly, gratefully, so the rattler was moved carefully over to a large flat rock near the trail, where they could readily find it on their way back.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLIZZARD ON GRIZZLY SLIDE

As the adventurers advanced up the mountain-side, the pines grew closer until it was almost impossible to ride between the great trees that crowded on either side of the faint trail.

"Polly, I don't see how we can go much farther!" said Anne, who had never before been as high as this.

"Oh, we are only one-third of the way up, Anne," smiled Polly, swinging Noddy suddenly to one side to avoid a bowlder of rock that had rolled upon the trail.

After more arduous climbing, the horses unexpectedly came out into a vast clearing, called a "park" by the natives. It was acres in extent, fringed about by the heavy close growth of pines. The girls exclaimed at the beauty of the spot, for wild-mountain flowers grew profusely among the thick buffalo grass.

"Now, then, every one of you start at this point and hunt for the trail. I haven't been here since

last summer when we went for that trapper and his pelts. I didn't look for the blaze then, but it was here, so we must find it to help us find the way out!" called Polly, as she guided Noddy slowly past the fringe of forest trees, looking carefully at each tree.

"Goodness, Polly! Do you ever expect to find an opening in this tangle of trees?" asked Barbara.

"We can if Polly says there's one!" declared Anne, riding her horse carefully in the opposite direction from Polly.

Eleanor permitted her burro to follow after Polly, as she hadn't the slightest idea of what the blaze or trail would look like. Consequently, she was directly behind Polly when she shouted, "I've found it!"

The other girls wheeled their horses and galloped over to the place where Polly was swinging the ax about her head.

With several good whacks, she chopped down enough young aspens to clear a way through the brush, thus exposing to view an old tree bearing a blaze over twenty years old.

"I'll show you how to count the age," said Polly, beginning at the outer bark and counting the rings plainly lined from the new bark into the

tree until she reached the place where the blaze had been made.

"How interesting! Then that means this trail was made twenty years ago!" said Barbara.

"Maybe twenty times twenty years ago, for all we know. Nobody really knows how old this trail is, for it was used by the Indians as far back as the oldest trappers and hunters know and have heard tell from their fathers and grandfathers!" replied Polly, swinging into the saddle and telling Noddy to proceed.

The little burro obediently went into the seemingly impassable thicket, the other horses following. After they had traveled for ten or fifteen yards, the undergrowth thinned until they were going on pine-needle-covered ground as soft as moss. The silent forest with its sentinel pines, spreading a canopy overhead, seemed like another world from the bright glare of the one left behind that morning.

The trees were so tall and majestic, with great fragrant green tops that scarcely allowed a sunbeam to penetrate to the pale green twilight underneath, that a solemn peace pervaded the minds of the young adventurers. The singing of birds, or the crackling of dry twigs, as wild creatures sprang over them, were the only sounds heard.

No shrubs or vegetation obstructed this impressive place, so the girls rode on in silence, until the trail ascended again. Near the confines of this forest, Polly suddenly reined in Noddy and held out a warning hand. Right across their pathway sped a young deer. It paused by the side of a sheltering pine-trunk, with head erect and fore-foot poised gracefully, gazing steadily at the strange creatures who dared intrude upon those sacred precincts!

It as suddenly vanished again, and the girls breathed deeply.

"Oh, for our camera!" cried Eleanor.

"How stupid of us to leave it home," added Barbara.

"It's always the way. Who remembers a kodak until it is needed," laughed Anne.

"John promised to bring me a fine camera this summer, but he never came home from college, so I didn't get it," said Polly, wistfully.

"Haven't you one, Poll?" wondered Eleanor.

"Not yet."

"It's a shame—and you with such wonderful ways to use it. The moment we get home, I shall give you my new one, and you can give me some prints from it in exchange," said Eleanor, generously.

"Why, Eleanor Maynard! Yours is brand new and cost forty dollars!" cried shocked Barbara.

"Of course it's new! Would I give my best friend a second-hand thing?" retorted Eleanor.

"Oh, Nolla, it's awfully good of you but I wouldn't think of taking it!" exclaimed Polly, gratefully.

"If you don't I'll give it to Sary, and then you can look for trouble! She'll snap pictures of Jeb at dinner, of Jeb at the pump, and Jeb here, there, and everywhere!"

The girls laughed merrily at the pictures outlined, and the camera was forgotten.

After climbing for two hours more, Noddy wrinkled his nose and twitched his sensitive ears.

"Noddy scents water. See, Choko is acting the same way," called Polly; and sure enough both burros were making faces at the sky-line.

In a short time the riders reached another Park but this one was not half the size of the first. Instead of encircling forest trees, the girls saw giant up-thrusts of rock that cleft the blue sky. On each side of the widened trail stood lodgepole pine that ran up to the summit and down the other side of the peak.

"At last—Top Notch Trail!" exclaimed Polly.

"You seem relieved?" ventured Anne.

"I am, because I half-doubted whether I would remember the right route without an older guide."

"When in doubt don't do anything," suggested Eleanor.

"If we didn't do anything we wouldn't have been up here," argued Anne.

"This trail runs straight to Grizzly Slide, a glacial peak I've always wanted to see. Father never had time to take me and mother wouldn't allow me to find it alone. Explorers say it is a permanent glacier that seldom changes its form as most of our other snow-capped peaks do in summertime."

"How I'd love to see it!" sighed Eleanor.

"It sounds as if we were in Switzerland about to visit the Alps," added Barbara.

"Have you any plans for to-day, Polly?" asked Anne.

"Nothing particular. I thought we would try for this trail and have dinner up here, then do whatever you liked before starting for home."

"How long might it take to ride along the top and hunt for Grizzly Slide?" asked Eleanor eagerly.

"I'm not sure of the distance, although I hear it is four miles from Four Mile Blaze. From

here to the blaze may be one or ten miles, but the going is fine on this trail," replied Polly, eagerly showing her inclinations.

"I simply won't consider going back home yet!" declared Eleanor.

"We might go on a bit further before eating, and then we can see what the trail is like. If we decided to try for the Grizzly Something-or-other Poll mentioned, I'll agree, all right!" ventured Anne, the gleam of adventure shining in her eyes.

"I'm the only molly-coddle in the crowd and I'd like to see more of this mountain, myself," laughed Barbara.

"'Nuff said,' when Barbara talks like that!" laughed Eleanor.

So they continued along the crest of the mountain from which grand views of distant peaks and vast forest-sides could be seen. The brilliant hues of wild flowers, everywhere, mottled the ground; the dark-green of towering pines, or again the shorter aspens like pickets on guard in the foreground; the bleached skeletons of lodge-pole pine burnt clean in forest fires; and just before the riders, the plunging water falling from a cliff that shut out any glimpse of the trail ahead, combined to produce a master-piece of Nature's work.

"Why not camp at those Falls for dinner?" asked Eleanor.

"Good idea—I'm half-starved," admitted Anne.

"And maybe the horses can rest, too," from Barbara.

"Bob's going to join the S. P. C. A. soon," laughed Eleanor.

"No, I'm not, but horses will last longer if you feed and rest them, and I do not care to walk home!" retorted Barbara.

"I brought my fishing tackle, girls, and while you are unpacking dinner I may as well cast for a few trout in that stream," suggested Polly.

"Can you fish trout?" exclaimed Barbara, wonderingly.

"Can a bird fly?" laughed Anne.

"The idea! A westerner and *not* know how to fish!" scorned Eleanor.

But Barbara was not sensitive to-day so did not feel offended at these remarks; neither did she take pains to disguise her real sentiments when it would have been kinder to keep silence on a subject.

Having reached the base of the cliff, the girls found a delightful spot for the luncheon. The packs were slipped from Choko and he, with the

other mounts, were hobbled and left to graze on the buffalo grass in the clearing.

The girls unpacked a pannier while Polly arranged her tackle and started for the top of the cliff whence fell the water.

"Let me go with you, Poll, and watch?" asked Eleanor.

"If you won't speak, and mind you don't slip and fall!"

"I won't," promised Eleanor, crawling up after the sure-footed Polly until both reached the top.

To their surprise, the girls found a cleft between two great rocks with a quiet pool resting at the base. The current passed, rushing onward to the Falls, but the water circulating in the nook scarcely rippled. Even as the two girls watched, a flash of a speckled back flounced up in play and splashed their shoes.

"*What* a spot for trout!" whispered Polly, crawling out to the rim of a rock while Eleanor watched breathlessly.

"Not too far out, Poll!" whispered Eleanor, anxiously, as Polly leaned over the edge to gaze into the clear depths.

Without a word, Polly carefully cast her fly far out upon the smooth surface of the sparkling water. Then flashes deep down, and in incredibly

short time a large speckled trout rose to the bait, and Polly felt her nerves tauten with the excitement of the sportsman. Eleanor held her breath for fear the trout would disappear.

Polly landed that one, weighing at least three pounds, then caught two more, weighing about two pounds each.

"Guess these will be enough for this noon. No use catching more than we need!" remarked Polly, coming back to Eleanor's side.

The girls hastened down the rocks and brought the fish over to the place where Polly expected to find a good fire burning.

"Why, I don't see any fire—didn't you build one for the fish?" cried Polly.

"You didn't tell us to! Anyway, what would we make it with—no matches and no kindlings!" replied Barbara.

"Can't you girls start fire with flint—or some sticks?" asked Polly, curiously.

"The only fire I can light is with a safety match and the valve of a gas-stove!" replied Barbara, quaintly.

The others considered her remark very funny and Polly promised to teach them how to make a fire with two sticks only!

"Do it now, and fry the fish for us!" said Eleanor.

"No, it will be too late for us to begin all that now. We had better wait until supper-time. We really ought to be on the trail by this time," said Polly.

"Child alive! You don't intend being out in the woods at supper-time, do you?" gasped Barbara, fearfully.

Polly laughed. "Is that so fearful? Why, I think it is piles of fun to camp out on a fine night!"

"Maybe you do, but remember the rattle-snake! We may be sleeping on the ground when one comes along—*Oh,* OH!" cried Barbara, shivering.

"Oh, come now, Bob! No use conjuring up such gruesome pictures to tickle your nerves!" exclaimed Eleanor, impatiently.

"If you don't want to go on to Grizzly Slide, now's the time to say so! When we get there it will be too late to complain about the lateness of the hour in getting home!" said sensible Polly.

"Oh, we all want to go to Grizzly Slide!" asserted Anne, hastily.

"And we will take everything that comes with it!" declared Eleanor, eagerly.

"Well, all right, but for the love of goodness, don't let's camp in the wilderness all night!" cried Barbara.

They sat down after that discussion and ate the sandwiches and fruit, but Polly wanted a piece of the chocolate cake she thought Sary had packed for them.

"I couldn't find any! We looked through and found only sandwiches in the papers," said Anne.

"Oh, pshaw! I was sure there was cake!" grumbled Polly.

"It may possibly be in the bottom of the other pannier, as we didn't unpack everything, you know," suggested Barbara.

"If it is, we'll eat it to-night for supper. At least we know Sary packed *something* good for us," added Anne.

Once more on the trail, the adventurers rode through forests where the notes of unseen birds blending with the murmur of pines sounded like weird music to the city girls.

"Just like the sea's roar in a conch-shell, isn't it?" whispered Anne, as she listened rapturously.

They passed tumbling, hurrying mountain streams where the burnished trout flashed swiftly back and forth in the clear water. They came

to an upland park where the soft whistle of quail caused Polly to lift her rifle, but the whir of wings told of a flight. From jagged rents in the cliffs, through which the horses passed, their hoofs ringing echoes from the iron-veined rock, they came to sleepy hollows where the Quaker Aspens stood ghostlike as sentinels on guard before their beautiful Eden.

Having climbed one peak and descended it, then the next one, and so on, and on, following the winding trail that became more difficult to find and more dangerous to climb, Polly finally drew rein beside a tree distinctly scarred.

"Hurrah! The blaze to the Slide," shouted she, scraping away the lichen that covered the spot.

Glad of an excuse to jump down and stretch their limbs, the other girls joined Polly at the tree and saw the blaze, although so old, to be perfectly plain and easily traced.

"Four miles to Grizzly Slide!" read Polly, exultantly.

"But it must be three o'clock or more. When can we hope to get back home?" murmured Barbara, glancing down the trail they just left.

"Too late to worry about that now," said Eleanor.

"I plan to see Grizzly Slide and then camp, somewhere," said Polly.

"That is the best thing, now," added Anne.

"You don't mean to sleep out in this awful wilderness, do you?" gasped Barbara.

"No, we're going to engage a suite of rooms at the 'Queen Victoria' for to-night!" jeered Eleanor.

"I hope to reach the Slide and ride back to those Falls for camp. We have fish and pasture and soft moss there," said Polly.

"Ideal place, too," approved Anne.

"But the wild beasts, and, oh, suppose a rattler comes along while we are asleep?" almost sobbed Barbara.

"He'll steer clear of you, Bob!" retorted Eleanor.

"Come on, girls, don't waste time arguing, or we'll camp on top of the peak, yonder," laughed Polly, jumping back into her saddle and urging Noddy along the way.

Although Grizzly Slide was but four miles from the blaze, the trail was so rough that the horses had to go slowly. Too, the rarefied air strained the animals' hearts and Polly advised frequent halts to rest the heavily breathing beasts.

During those four miles, the trail often opened from the heavy timber and gave a glimpse of far-off valleys, and dreadfully nearby abysses that made one feel that one was on top of the world. Even the pines in the nearer crests and clefts looked like wisps of green—so small they appeared from the tremendous height.

The trail finally led through a thick forest of lodge-pole pine that looked interminable, but suddenly ended at a line as if it had been purposely cleared away. The riders all sat in silent awe at the sight before them. They had reached Grizzly Slide!

The snow-capped peak, reaching an altitude, from the clearing where they stood, of at least a thousand feet sheer up, dazzled their eyes in the bright sunshine. To the left of the peak, the sides dropped down almost perpendicularly to the level floor of a valley many thousand feet below. To the right, the snow-fields stretched across a vast area before any timber could be seen on the downward slope.

The snow of the Slide was continually melting in summer and furnishing icy streams that cut through in every direction to reach the vales far down. The temperature was almost at freezing

point near the peak, and the girls quickly donned their sweaters which had been packed in Choko's panniers.

In removing the sweaters, Polly accidentally pulled out a heavy coil of rope, but hung it back on one of the knobs of Choko's harness instead of buckling it inside the pocket. Well she did, too.

"Come on, girls, I want to see what that blue line is over on the ice-field," said Polly, starting up the Slide.

The horses were sharp-shod and sure-footed, so the girls rode as safely as if on the mossy trail, but they had not gone far before Polly began murmuring to herself.

"What's the matter?" wondered Anne, aloud.

"That blue line looks to me like a crevice in the ice."

"What of that?" asked Barbara, stupidly.

"That shows something queer! This slide seldom cracks into fissures, but when it does it means trouble. If that crevice goes down very deep it shows unusual warmth underneath. And that may move this upper section of ice-field any time, thus creating an awful land-slide, don't you see?"

"Oh, mercy! Let's hurry back!" cried Barbara, wheeling her horse immediately.

"It isn't likely to occur as quickly as that, Bob," said Anne, soothingly. Then turning to Polly, said: "But this slide is said to be stationary."

"It *has* moved, but so seldom that folks never fear it. I know something about land-slides after living in Pebbly Pit for fourteen years, and even a little slide at the lava cliffs causes an awful destruction, so I can picture what this gigantic slide would do if it ever got started down!"

"You said it happened when Montresor's Mine was buried?" reminded Eleanor.

"Yes, a small one then, and it may happen again, so we won't stay another moment," begged Barbara, from a distance.

"It's all right at present, Bob, and I'm going to see if the chasm runs along very far," returned Polly, riding Noddy away from the girls.

Anne and Eleanor watched the blinding peak where clouds drifted lazily about so that the top of the crest was visible only now and then. At such times, the sun flashed upon the ice and reflected myriad colors as in a rainbow.

"Isn't it just beautiful!" sighed Anne.

"As wonderful and beautiful as his Satanic Majesty!" declared Eleanor, but she anxiously watched Polly ride along the brink of the fissure.

"Oh, girls! Won't you please come home! I won't be easy till my horse is traveling that corduroy road again!" wailed Barbara.

The others laughed. "You complained about *that* when we crossed it. The time may come when you'd be glad to be standing on Grizzly Slide—after it has slid!" teased Eleanor.

"Now I'm going back! So there!" threatened Barbara, but she remained exactly where she was, for she feared to go back alone.

"Well, it looks as if we would have to return unrewarded. I can't find a place safe enough to cross to the peak, and the crevice seems to run all the way across and deep down, too," said Polly, coming back to join Anne and Eleanor.

"Now will you come back?" nagged Barbara, desperately.

"In a minute! We want to watch those rainbow-tinted clouds—they are so beautiful!" sighed Anne.

But even as she spoke, the fleecy clouds of snowy white changed quickly to gray. From gray they turned to dark ominous-looking colors, and Polly hastily glanced at the sun.

"Let's ride back at once!" said she shortly.

Noddy was turned and urged to lead off as fast as possible, but Polly turned every few moments

to watch the clouds now gathering in somber banks and falling down over the Slide.

"Girls, make more haste!" ordered she.

"What's the matter, Poll?" called Anne, who was in the rear.

"I want to get you-all to the timber line just as fast as we can travel. Don't waste breath talking—just *ride!*" cried Polly, fearfully.

"I told you to come home. I knew something terrible would happen up here!" wailed Barbara, trying to push her horse, by leaning far over his neck.

"Yes, you always were a Calamity Jane. If we'd left you down with the rattle-snake we wouldn't have been so hoo-dooed!" cried Eleanor, in her nervousness.

"Noddy, dear, won't you go faster? We must set a better pace for the others, you see, pet!" said Polly to her little burro.

Apparently Noddy understood the need of a brisker step, for she started so that she soon outdistanced the others and Polly had to wait for them. As she waited impatiently, she watched the clouds sweeping down and along over the ice-fields. Then she remembered the rope hung on Choko's collar. She jumped off, grabbed it, and soon had Choko securely fastened to the end

of the rope. Another loop was fastened to Noddy's collar. As the others rode up she tied a loop to each mount so that a chain was made of the five animals.

"Is it a blizzard or a tornado, Poll?" gasped Anne.

"Don't know! Just race on as fast as you can!"

Then as they hurried across the icy slope, the sun seemed suddenly quenched and the daylight turned to sodden drab. Heavy drifts of snow could be seen falling headlong from the clouds hanging about the peak, making a wonderful if awesome sight.

"Girls, our lives are in jeopardy unless we reach the timber belt!" shouted Polly, trying to outcry the wind that shrieked down the Slide.

Noddy, brave little burro, quivered in dread of the elements sweeping about them, but she responded to Polly's call and fairly dragged the trembling Choko after her.

The hurricane was now screaming about the peak and howling horribly through the fissures in the ice. As the blizzard gathered fury and strength, the clouds, like rags torn from the sky, raged past the riders, every now and then sweeping the snow completely over them. Still the full fury of the gale had not yet appeared.

Polly stopped momentarily and yelled back her orders: "Every one grab hold on the tail of the horse in front of you!"

They comprehended the sense of this advice, but could not manage to act upon it, as the drifts of snow and ice made it impossible to jump from the saddle, or lean over to hold to anything.

By this time, everything was hidden from sight and even the foremost rider looked ghostlike in the gray light and snow. The trail was obliterated by the drifts and the going was slippery and slow.

"We've simply *got* to make that timber, girls!" shouted Polly, more to encourage than to urge, as she knew the beasts were doing their utmost.

The three other girls, too cold and frightened to speak, clung to their animals hopelessly. Noddy seemed imbued with supernatural powers, for she never made a miss-step or swerved from the trail, although it was invisible. This instinct of scent, so marvelous in these little burros, proved the salvation of the adventurers.

Then darkness fell completely and the storm broke loose in its fierce madness, so confusing the chain of horses that they stamped and turned until the rope was so tangled that the riders were threatened with being thrown. Even in that awful

moment, Polly was glad she tied the beasts together, for surely one or another of them would have bolted or strayed to doom with its rider.

Noddy seemed the only animal to keep her sense. As the other horses snorted and wheeled, Polly cried desperately:

"Noddy, Noddy! Can't you help us out?"

With a tremendous spurt of strength the little burro pulled herself free from the tangle, dragging Choko along, too. The other horses soon calmed down again and followed in the wake.

A glassy surface had formed over everything, so that a slip would prove extremely dangerous on that steep slide, but Noddy plodded along as if she knew that the responsibility of all depended upon her accuracy in trailing. The girls had to trust blindly to the burro's sixth sense, as no one could see whether a yawning chasm or a rocky projection was directly before them.

"Polly, I'm failing! I can't stick on another moment!" cried Anne, her voice reaching Polly, as the wind blew in that direction.

"Anne Stewart—you *must!* We're right at the timber-line now, and I'd be ashamed to say you gave in before Barbara!" shrilled Polly, to give her friend new endurance.

"I'm all in, too!" wailed the plaintive voice of Eleanor.

"Oh, dear God, tell me what to do?" screamed Polly, as if she must *make* the Almighty hear and help.

Just as all seemed at its worst, the wind suddenly died down, and the gloomy mantle of darkness lifted perceptibly. Polly felt sure the cessation of wind and sleet was but a lull before a second and worse cloud-sweep, but she made the most of the interval.

"One more step, girls, and we are safe! Keep up courage!"

To Noddy she crooned anxiously: "Now or never again, little one!"

Noddy turned momentarily to look into her beloved mistress's eyes as if to plead for breath and a moment's rest, and then she responded to the call of necessity and led the staggering line to the timber just as the gale began anew.

It was darker in the forest of lodge-pole pine than out on the ice-field, but the timber offered comparative refuge from the driving sleet and wind. Another difficulty presented itself, however, in the close growth of trees. To avoid collision with the crowded trunks, it became neces-

sary to undo the rope that held the five beasts together. Each was thus allowed to roam his own way, and this was the more hazardous, as the hurricane ofttimes tore up a smaller pine and, twisting it about like a cork-screw, flung it down like a straw.

Noddy seemed possessed to travel in a certain direction, so Polly, sure of a burro's instinct for shelter and refuge, gave her her head. Eleanor's burro also seemed anxious to go in the same direction Noddy took, and followed in her footsteps. But Choko, freed from the detaining rope and not so worn by battling the gale with a rider to carry, made for a spot to the right of Noddy.

Suddenly Eleanor screamed and pointed at Choko. "Oh, look quick! Choko! Choko!"

Even as she cried, Choko was seen frantically scrambling on the verge of a cliff, and suddenly vanished over its side.

CHAPTER XIII

A NIGHT IN THE CAVE

"Oh, my little Choko!" sobbed Polly, quickly turning Noddy to go down to the edge of the precipice where the burro had slipped over and down.

"Now we haven't a thing to eat, and no blankets for the night! I knew this was a foolish outing," complained Barbara.

Eleanor failed to hear her sister's selfish remark, for she was driving her burro closely upon Noddy's heels. Anne was so impatient at Barbara that she urged her horse after Eleanor to keep herself busy.

"Good gracious! Am I to sit here alone and freeze! I'm sure I'm not such a fool as to have the same thing happen to me as it did to Choko," cried Barbara, but the wind carried her words back to Grizzly Slide.

Polly slid from her saddle and stretched out flat upon the brink to peer over the edge for a

possible sight of the burro. As she did so, she saw a mass of baggage and burro scramble upright and shake itself violently. Then a plaintive whinny rose up to welcome the fearful girls.

"Whoa! Whoa, Choko!" shouted Polly, instantly.

Jumping up, she called to Eleanor: "Choko fell upon a ledge, but there's a great hole behind him and should he back he will surely fall in and be lost. I'm going down to lead him out!"

"Oh, Polly, don't risk your precious life for a burro!" screamed Barbara, hysterically.

"If Noddy can creep down, I'll save Choko without risk to myself," declared Polly, climbing in the saddle.

"If Polly goes, I go too!" exclaimed Eleanor, turning her burro to follow Noddy.

"Don't you dare! Nolla—think of mother grieving for you, and me left alone in Colorado, helpless!" cried Barbara.

"Now I'm going, anyway! I'd like mother to appreciate me," was Eleanor's unexpected reply, but Anne caught an undaunted look in the girl's eyes.

The combined persuasions of Barbara and Anne had no effect on Eleanor, who, truth to tell, exulted in this daring feat and would not have

missed the thrill for anything. But her burro balked at the point where Noddy began the descent.

Noddy was making for a place where the ledge met the downward slope of the mountain-side. The burro felt about for sure footing and then took a step forward. Prodding carefully again she took the next step, and so on. Sometimes, feeling suspiciously, she would essay a step and as suddenly bring back her hoof before breaking into the pit. Thus taking one assured step after another, she finally reached the beginning of the ledge where Choko had landed.

Upon the mountain-side where the frozen girls and beasts trembled, the wind howled and the blizzard swept along between the trunk of trees, but on the ledge Polly found comparative shelter and only now and then a blast of the gale.

She stopped to beckon to Eleanor and then urged Noddy along the foothold cleft from the cliff. Above, the rock-wall rose to the mountain-top; beneath, Polly could not gauge the depth—it was too dreadful and was now blurred by fine drifts from the blizzard.

After what seemed an age, Polly reached Choko, who still stood obedient to his mistress's command of "Whoa." But he shook and seemed

completely broken up with fear and the shock of the fall.

"Dear little Choko!" purred Polly, jumping from Noddy's back and softly patting the burro's woolly face.

The burro affectionately nosed Polly, who gazed quickly at what she thought to be a pit back of the little beast. She gasped in wonderment and went to the dark hole. Then she quickly ran back and took hold of Noddy's and Choko's bridles. Standing thus, she shouted to the anxious girls above:

"Come down as carefully as I did and here you will find a cave." With that she disappeared into the yawning black hole, leading both burros.

Barbara and Anne stared at each other in amazement, and the latter said: "Come carefully! Anything is better than freezing here."

Eleanor had already reached the ledge, when Polly came forth from the cavern to shout out advices. The two older girls made the perilous descent safely, and then guided their horses along the ledge until all stood before the cave where the burros were waiting.

"Isn't this a miracle?" cried Polly, the moment all were safe and the poor beasts were being led inside the refuge.

The girls laughed and cried hysterically when they saw the haven, but the animals seemed uneasy, and Noddy came up to Polly with fear apparent in her expressive eyes.

"Noddy, are you frightened? Surely no wild beast can be in here, at present?" queried Polly, looking around in the semi-gloom.

"Polly! What can it be?" shrieked Barbara, clinging to Anne in fear.

"Better get out again, Polly," suggested Eleanor, seeing the horses paw the floor, and strain their eyes to see.

"Are we safe here, Polly dear?" asked Anne.

"Safer here than up there," returned Polly, and as she spoke a great tree was flung down over the edge of the gorge just where ledge and slope met.

"Now we can't crawl out if we wanted to—the tree obstructs the way," declared Polly, decidedly.

"But we must see what it is that disturbs the animals," advised Anne.

"I'd rather throw myself over the cliff than be clawed to bits by a panther!" wailed Barbara.

"The horses are quieting down now, and Noddy seems as much at home as anywhere, so I reckon it was only strangeness that made them act queer," said Eleanor.

"But something may pounce out upon us, and take us unawares!" wailed Barbara.

"I propose to smoke them out as soon as I make a fire!" said Polly, looking about in the darkness of the cave for a possible stick of wood, but not finding any.

"I'll have to chop some of that pine! Noddy can carry me safer than I can walk on this ledge, so I want you girls to promise to keep the horses close about you and wait right here until I get back!" said Polly, taking the ax from the pack.

"Polly, I'm coming too! Two axes are better than one, and I can ride my burro, too!" declared Eleanor.

Anne and Polly sent the girl a look of gratitude, while Barbara was speechless until after Eleanor started to go, then she remonstrated volubly.

The two girls crept toward the down-thrown pine, and Eleanor said, "We'll need wood for a fire, won't we?"

"Yes, we will have to remain in the cave all night, and it gets so terribly cold upon these mountain peaks that we will be frozen unless we warm up the interior of the cavern. Then, too, we may need to keep fires going at the back end of the cave as well as in front, to ward off wild beasts!"

They were slowly advancing when another awful crash came from the slope above. Both girls ducked instinctively, but the decayed pine that was broken off above ground fell over the edge of the cliff just in front of them and obstructed the way so that progress was impossible.

Eleanor quaked and cried, "Oh, let's go back, Polly!"

But Polly laughed. "Glory be, our fire-wood came to us halfway."

At her cheerful words, Eleanor braced up again.

Polly jumped from Noddy's back and started to hew at the soft decayed wood. It was easy to chop and would furnish a flaring fire, even though it would burn rapidly and need constant replenishing.

"Nolla, this is the second miracle to-day! Had we hunted the mountain over, no better wood could have been found for just our need. Yonder on that other pine, when this is out of our way, awaits our bedding."

"What funny bedding!"

"Just you wait and see."

When enough wood was chopped to clear a way on the ledge, Polly showed Eleanor how to make bundles of it. These were tied by means

of the rope to Noddy's harness and carefully dragged back to the cave. Several trips had to be made before both burros had brought the firewood to the growing pile in the cave.

When Polly spoke of cutting balsam for beds, Anne offered to help, as she was so cold.

"And leave me here alone?" cried Barbara.

"Why don't you come with us?" asked Eleanor.

"I'm dead! I can't do another thing!"

"Then stay here and cheer the burros," said Eleanor.

"I won't let every one of you go and leave me to be killed by a wild animal," shuddered Barbara, looking over her shoulder.

"Nothing wild here, but you, Bob. However, you may light a fire for us, while we are gone," retorted Eleanor, unsympathetically.

Without further comment, Barbara was left, and soon the girls were stripping the spruce which had blown over the ledge. Its green branches would make the softest of wild-wood beds.

"It really was fortunate that both these trees came down when they did! We would have to remove them as obstacles to our going out in the morning, and I would have had to hunt well before I could have found such fine tinder! So I've really saved myself a double chopping!" said

Polly, as they tied up the last bundle of evergreen branches and started the burros for the cave.

"I'm just frozen, and I wish you would hurry and build a fire!" cried Barbara, petulantly, when the girls came within hearing.

No one replied, but Eleanor was furious, while the others were impatient with the girl.

"I was so hungry that I tried to get a sandwich out of the pannier, but something made a noise back in the cave, and I'm sure it was a rattle-snake buzzing!" added Barbara, trying to win sympathy from the stony-faced companions.

"Pooh! You've got rattle-snake on the brain! It would have done you good to get out there with us and do some rattling of the ax on the wood!"

"Why, Nolla! How unkind you are since we came to this awful country!" cried Barbara, not able to find a handkerchief, and sniffing audibly.

"Here! Use this to amuse yourself with while *we work!*" said Eleanor, taking a neatly folded handkerchief from her coat pocket.

When Eleanor turned again to the others, she found Anne had unharnessed the burros and piled the saddles upon a stone projection near the opening of the cave.

There were numerous little finger-like caves

that branched out from the main cave, but they led nowhere and seemed empty. Polly noticed that the dry leaves and loose shale scattered about appeared to have been undisturbed for months. Some of the leaves were from the harvest of the previous fall, so she felt sure no beast had prowled about the "fingers."

Coming to a much larger extension than any of the others had been, Polly called out: "This must be the thumb of the hand!"

"Sure it isn't the arm!" laughed Eleanor.

"Ah, I thought so—now I have it!" murmured Polly, finding a nest of leaves and soft feathers packed down with bits of fur and dry grass.

"What have you found?" eagerly asked three voices.

"The lair of a grizzly. I've got him!" cried Polly, triumphantly.

Instantly, three girls screamed and turned to run, and Polly laughed.

"I've got him on the *outside*, girls! He can't get in with that fire smoking his front doorway, you see."

"Oh, hurry back and pile more wood on the fire!" cried Eleanor, quaking with fear.

"Yes, yes, Polly! Come away and let's build more fires!" added Barbara, not knowing which

one of the girls to hide behind, and looking at the horses as if pondering a refuge with them.

"What! And use all of our 'safety first' before dawn! If you waste the wood now, what will you do when old grizzly comes prowling home and finds your fires dying down?" said Polly.

"Well, do have one of us go and tend the fire carefully so it can't possibly die down and let him in!" added Anne.

"We are almost through exploring, so we may as well finish! Then we will all go and have supper and feed the animals."

The remainder of the cave proved to be a rocky wall gradually sloping down until it reached the entrance again. But, just at one side of the "thumb" was an aperture from which the wind blew in, as could be seen when Polly held her torch down to the opening.

"That leads out somewhere, and that opening is big enough to let a panther creep through, or a wild-cat! I'd like to crawl through there and make sure where it comes out and if it is quite safe on the other side," suggested Polly, looking at the girls.

"Oh, Polly dear! Don't do it! Suppose something should happen to you!" cried Anne.

"Why, I wouldn't let it, Anne! If I creep

through that tunnel, I'd shove the torch in first and keep it moving ahead of me all the way, so that nothing could grab me, you see!" said Polly, half laughingly.

"I say, Polly, let well enough alone. Let's go back and get supper and rest for to-morrow!" advised Barbara.

"But just s'posing a rattle-snake was coiled up inside that tunnel! A burro wouldn't smell it, and it could crawl out during the night and take a good straight bite!" teased Eleanor.

Polly laughed, but Barbara thought Eleanor meant it, so she replied: "Then Polly had better go in and see if everything is safe for the night."

Anne had been so rudely shocked that day at the selfishness apparent in Barbara's character, that she did not try to hide her opinion. The wonder was, that she ever could have been so completely taken in during the months in Denver, as to declare Barbara to be a splendid girl when one knew her. She now decided that it took ranch life and mountain exploits to show up genuine characteristics and thoughts.

"Polly, I'll go in first!" offered Eleanor, dropping to her knees to crawl in at the opening.

"Eleanor Maynard! Come back here!" cried Barbara, taking hold of her sister's feet.

"Nolla, you shan't take the glory from me!" laughed Polly.

Meantime Eleanor was pulled back and rolled over, laughing as heartily as if she were at a farce-comedy.

"Now listen to me!" advised Polly, shaking a finger at the three girls. "First of all, Anne and Bob must go and watch the fires, then unpack the panniers, and next make beds of the tips—you know how, Anne?"

"I've watched the school children at Bear Forks weave it, so I'm sure I can make them, too," replied Anne.

"Good! You stick the little stem-ends under the soft fuzz of the others just laid. The principal thing is not to have hard prods hurting the body, and the tips will take care of the springs and softness, all right," said Polly.

"While Anne is making the beds, Bob can fix up odds and ends of spruce and leaves in the 'fingers' for the horses' beds—a bed in each finger, Bob. If the animals are comfortably bedded down they will be fresh in the morning. And if we hide them in those fingers the scent will not be

so apt to reach a grizzly or lion should any prowl about to-night."

"Where shall I place the spruce beds for us?" asked Anne.

"Fix up two on each side of the cave as near the entrance as possible, Anne. We need air and the warmth from the fires. Then, too, we can hear any wild beast that may prowl around to-night," advised Polly. "If Nolla wants to go with me she takes *second* place, see!"

Eleanor laughed and said, "Anywhere as long as we start!"

"Polly, first I want you to promise me not to be reckless in going through that tunnel. If you meet with the slightest danger or hazard, promise to back right out again," begged Anne.

"All right, Anne, I promise, but my shoes will mar my follower's beauty if I back down on her face."

Thus joking to make little of the danger, Polly started in through the hole. Eleanor followed and the two older girls stood watching until not a sound, or ray of the torch, could be seen. Then they went to the front of the cave to replenish the fires and prepare supper.

CHAPTER XIV

OLD MONTRESOR'S LEGACY

"I'm afraid to fix the beds in those finger caves, Anne," whimpered Barbara, coming over to where the young woman was weaving the beds of spruce.

"What is there to be afraid of? The burros and horses won't hurt you, and they are too weary with this day's troubles to bother about kicking or trampling you. However, you can do this, if you like, and I will make up the beds for the beasts."

The spruce beds were being made—Anne showing Barbara how to lay the tips in rows as wide as the bed was to be, then folding under the sticks of the second row to run under the tips of the first row, and so on, until the length of the bed was made.

This work finished, and the bedding for the horses arranged in the "fingers" as Polly had

directed, the two girls stood near the entrance of the cave, wondering what possibly could have happened to keep Polly and Eleanor so long.

"I just felt in my bones that it was an awful risk to go into the black hole of the unknown!" cried Barbara.

"It isn't that that bothers me at all, Bob. But Polly has no sense of fear, and I think they may have found an exit at the other end, so Polly is coming around that way. It is a hazardous thing to do, in this storm!" said Anne.

"Anne, can't you try to squeeze in there and see what has happened?" asked Barbara.

Anne looked at her without saying a word, so Barbara thought she hesitated on account of leaving her alone in the cave.

"I won't mind staying alone for a little time. I'll watch the fires and see that the horses do not get away!" said Barbara.

"Really!" was all Anne said, as she turned to place another pine knot on the fire.

But the tone silenced Barbara, who had food for thought thereafter.

Meanwhile Polly and Eleanor had crawled into the aperture, and by dint of squirming and twisting through the passage, found that only the

section nearest the cave was of soft débris. It gradually widened as they advanced and Polly distinctly felt a current of cold air blowing in her face.

After creeping along for some distance without finding an outlet, Eleanor pulled on Polly's foot to attract her attention.

"Let's go back, Poll. No use hunting down in the bowels of Grizzly Slide."

"Nolla, the smoke of the torch blows harder than at first, and there is enough air to waft it backwards, so there will be an opening at the end, I am sure. That is what I must know for certain."

"All right, lead on! I'll be with you at the death!"

Polly chuckled at Eleanor's loyalty and crept on.

Finally Eleanor tugged again at her feet and shouted: "Hey, Polly! Aren't we most through to China? Let me know the moment you get the first peep at a pig-tail, as I have to brush the cobwebs from my Chinese!"

Polly laughed at the girl who made merry of a journey that would have staggered an older person. Finally, however, the tunnel widened so that

both girls could advance comfortably and then, suddenly, the flame of the torch and the smoke ceased to blow into their faces, for they had come out into an open space.

"We're here!" laughed Polly, trying to stand up and giving her head a smart rap against the overhanging rock.

"'We're here!' For goodness' sake, tell me where?" cried Eleanor, thrusting her torch ahead so that it was almost snuffed out against Polly's shoes.

"Gracious me, Nolla! Don't burn my soles!" cried Polly, managing to stand upright and hold aloft her torch.

"Ha, that's good! Don't burn your soul!" teased Eleanor.

But the moment the girls saw where they were, not another word was uttered, for they found themselves in a vault-like cave somewhat smaller than the entrance cave, but having no "fingers" or outside opening. The dome and sides were rocky, but everywhere, embedded in the rock, myriad points of light reflected as the flare of the torch lit up the place uncertainly.

Eleanor thrust up her torch also, and both girls pivoted around, forgetting about wild beasts and the errand they came upon. After blinking

at the bright yellow gleams for a time, Polly turned and stared at Eleanor.

"What is it?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Nolla. It looks like copper."

"Polly! If it's copper, then we're rich!"

Both girls rushed over to examine the metallic gleams at close range, and Polly frowned as a thought entered her mind. Eleanor turned and looked about to be sure no one could hear, and then whispered:

"Polly, it looks like gold! Can it be real GOLD!"

The girls stared at each other and then burst out into a simultaneous laugh. But it was excitement, not mirth, that occasioned it. Before the wild echoes had rung through the vault, the hysterical girls were tearing at the hard walls, trying in vain to dislodge a nugget.

"Oh, why did I leave that ax in the pannier!" wailed Polly.

"Isn't it always that way—when you need a thing!" exclaimed Eleanor.

In her haste to reach a fragment that looked easy to break off, Polly dropped the torch. She stooped to pick it up again and saw a nugget of the ore on the ground, half-covered with dirt.

"I've got a piece! Oh, Nolla, look! LOOK!" shouted Polly, holding aloft her treasure.

Eleanor ran over and both girls examined the chunk of yellow streaked and studded rock.

"Polly, it really looks like gold," ventured Eleanor, awed.

"And it's red-gold, too, like Old Man Montresor's nuggets," added Polly.

At the mention of the gold-seeker, both girls looked at each other and the same thought flashed to both of them at once.

"Maybe it is!" breathed Polly.

"Oh, Poll, hold the torch down near the ground so I can find a chunk, won't you?" beseeched Eleanor, now anxious to find a nugget for herself.

"There, Nolla—see over by the hole! A little piece for you."

Eleanor ran over and found it to be smaller than the one Polly found, but there was more metal in the nugget. They examined it closely and decided that the shining metal must be gold.

"I'm so excited that I feel as if wheels were turning all inside of me—do you?" laughed Eleanor, hugging her nugget to her heart.

"It's sort of a dizzy and squeamish feeling, isn't it?" explained Polly, looking at her compan-

ion. Then for the first time since they emerged from the tunnel, she noticed the face.

"Oh, Nolla! If you could but see yourself! Just like a negro, but streaky where you smudged the torch smoke from your eyes."

"You're no 'bleached blonde' either, Poll!" laughed Eleanor, rubbing her sleeve across her face and looking at the soot in amusement.

"But mine can't be as black as yours, 'cause you got all the smoke from both torches."

"Never mind now; if this is gold we can afford to have the tunnel and cave wired with electricity at once," laughed the excited girl.

"Well, let's finish our hunt in the tunnel and then find some more nuggets for Anne and Barbara. They'll want a share, you know," suggested Polly.

"Good gracious, Poll! You're not going on *now*, are you?"

"Of course! The gold won't melt away, but we've got to close up any opening into outdoors, you know."

"Let's go back and tell the girls and then finish the tunnel work," pleaded Eleanor.

"How silly to worm a way back for the sake of showing off the ore. No, let's do this thing up and then go back to stay for the night. If we

don't close up any aperture, a wild beast may crawl through, then what good will the gold do us if we are dead?"

"Sensible as ever! Even gold can't turn your head!" said Eleanor, starting for the narrow place opposite the tunnel they came from.

"Funny, isn't it, that this cave should be here just as if it was an inflated bubble in a glass-blower's tube?" said Polly.

"I'll reserve my opinion till I see the end of the tube!" said Eleanor, waiting for Polly to creep into the opening.

After considerable twisting and crawling, Polly first, with her torch, and Eleanor second, they suddenly felt a current of fresh air.

"Oh! Oh, thank goodness!" gasped Polly. "I shoved the torch ahead! I'd have fallen headlong into this abyss."

"What is it, Poll?"

"A pit ever so wide, and I can't see how deep it goes down. It's right in the tunnel ground, cutting off all further investigations."

"It'll cut off investigations of a wild beast, too, won't it?" asked Eleanor with relief in her tones.

"Of course—there isn't a chance of anything coming in this way. I can hear water rushing, too, way down at the bottom, and the wind blows

up from this pit, so there must be an opening down there where the subterranean river rushes out."

"Maybe this tunnel was a river, once, and emptied down into that pit," ventured Eleanor.

"I don't care if it was! I'm anxious to go back and eat, now that we know the worst," replied Polly.

"We won't need both torches now, Poll, so drop yours in the pit and see how deep it may be," suggested Eleanor.

"All right, but for pity's sake don't let yours go out!"

Polly waited to steady the flame and then dropped the torch. It fell straight down and flared up showing the rocky sides of the pit, then suddenly it "sh-isshed" in water and all was dark once more.

The girls then wormed their way back to the gold cave (as they termed it) and sought for nuggets in the dust and dirt of ages that covered the rocky floor. Eleanor found a few pieces the size of walnuts and Polly secured a handful of small bits.

"How can we tie them up if we have to crawl back?" asked Eleanor.

"Got a handkerchief?"

"No, I gave it to Bob out of meanness," laughed Eleanor.

"Hum! Well, we might put them in our middy blouses, only we take a chance of losing them in squirming back through that tunnel," remarked Polly.

"I've heard of folks smuggling things in their shoes."

"I have it! Take off our shoes and put the nuggets in, then tie the shoe-strings tightly about the top and fasten them about our necks!" exclaimed Polly.

This being a good plan, both girls soon had their precious ore well-tied in their mountain boots, and were ready to proceed. As the two discoverers neared the cave where the others were, Polly shouted excitedly, and Eleanor joined in the clamor.

Anne and Barbara had become so frightened at the prolonged absence of the two girls that Anne was about to crawl in to find them, while Barbara realized how much she really loved her younger sister. The moment they heard the awful sounds issuing from the tunnel, however, they were certain a wild beast had attacked them and the victims were fighting a way out.

Anne grabbed the ax and held it aloft ready

to strike, while Barbara stood wringing her hands in despair. By this time Polly stuck her head out of the opening, but neither Barbara nor Anne recognized the black face—her voice alone told them it was Polly.

"Oh, my dear child! Are you badly hurt?" screamed Anne, dropping the ax and pulling Polly forth, Eleanor crawling directly after her.

"Gold! Gold! GOLD! See—lots of it! Mountains of it!" yelled Eleanor, trying to drag her nuggets from the boot without untying the strings.

"Oh, Anne, we found a gold mine! A great big cave full of gold!" cried Polly, managing to untie the strings.

"Poor children! Are you daffy?" exclaimed Anne, not sure whether to cry or laugh.

"You'll go daffy when you see that cave—all shining gold!" laughed Eleanor, handing her nugget to the curious sister.

"See here, Anne, isn't this gold?" asked Polly, working the large chunk of ore from her shoe.

"It looks like it, Polly, but I'm no judge."

"Oh, let's crawl in and see the cave!" now begged Barbara eagerly.

"You know you'd get stuck in that narrow tunnel, Bob! Besides, I'm starved," said Eleanor.

"Moreover, you wouldn't go when there seemed to be danger for the girls, and I'm sure I'm not going to try it now!" added Anne.

"Dear me, won't any one go with me?" complained Barbara, who stooped to gaze in at the tunnel, and seemed too fascinated to leave the spot.

"Bob, the gold has been there for centuries and it isn't likely to melt away while we eat supper!" declared practical Eleanor, following Anne to the opening of the cave.

As they went to the place where Anne had spread the supper, Polly told them of the magnificent sight when they crept out of the dark hole and saw the glimmering of the gold. Over and over, the two girls had to tell minutest details of the cavern, Barbara sighing, frequently, to think she was not small enough to crawl in and see for herself.

While the two adventurers washed their faces and hands with melted snow, Anne fried the fish over some red-hot embers scraped out of the fire. This done, they sat down to eat.

As they ate, they talked continually of their mine not so far from the festive board.

"Well, Polly, you surely were born with a silver spoon in your mouth!" sighed Anne, smilingly.

"What makes you say that?"

"You can see for yourself, can't you? First you fall into a family that owns no end of wealth in jeweled cliffs, and now you fall into a gold mine," replied Anne.

"But Nolla owns half of this mine, and I'm not so sure but you and Bob come in for your share!"

The other girls stared at Polly's generosity, as they had never thought of holding any interest in the mine.

"Anyway, nobody owns it yet! It legally belongs to the first one who files a claim, so what we must do is to hurry back to Oak Creek and register the mine," said Barbara, businesslike.

"My! Gold has brought Bob's brains uppermost!" teased Eleanor.

"Who knows but this claim has been staked years ago!" said Anne, meaningly.

Polly and Eleanor exchanged glances. But Barbara wondered.

"What do you mean?" asked she.

"Well, look out in front: there's a ledge cleft in the side of the mountain wall. Between it and the other lower ledge is a canyon that might be the one Montresor found on his up-climb. Yonder the slope meets the chasm and above is

the steep sides leading to Top Notch Trail. Could not the land-slide have buried this wall and then a great wash-out have cleared it again? If we only had a gushing mountain stream pouring from the cliff-side the setting would be complete!"

Barbara gasped, but Polly clapped her hands. "Nolla, that's it! The subterranean stream we found in there. Some big upheaval changed its outlet, or maybe this gold vein runs clean through and Montresor's claim is staked opposite this side—just where the river pours out. We must look over that side to-morrow."

The two younger girls then told of the pit and the river and all agreed that it might be the stream found by the prospector before the land-slide covered his claim.

CHAPTER XV

MONTRESOR'S CLAIM IS JUSTIFIED

POLLY turned to place the nuggets in the pannier and almost collided with Noddy.

"Hello, darling! What do you want—eh?" said she, patting the burro's head.

Noddy continued to gaze wistfully at her mistress and Polly said: "Anne, did you feed the burros and horses?"

"Yes, just as you told me to."

"And make the beds?"

"Yes, everything."

Then Noddy ambled over to a pan of dirty snow water, in which the explorers had washed their blackened faces. She would have to drink it, if her mistress couldn't understand what she needed!

"Oh, you Noddy! Is *that* what you want?" laughed Polly, taking the pan and running out to the ledge to fill it with clean snow. This she brought back and melted to provide drink for the burro.

"Did your thoughtless foster-mother forget a drink for her little Noddy!" crooned Polly, placing the pan for the thirsty burro. "After all that hard climbing and 'first-aid,' too!"

The other girls laughed at the wise little burro and her doting mistress, but Polly turned and said:

"It's lucky Noddy reminded me! We must water the horses well to-night if we want them in good shape for to-morrow."

So Eleanor and Polly gave drink to the thirsty animals while Anne took what was supposed to be a chocolate cake from the bottom of the pannier. It had been so shaken up during transit that the paper felt sticky.

While they all watched her open the bundle, Noddy went back to her finger-stall to sleep. Several wrappings of paper were unwound and finally Anne took forth the surprise Sary had mentioned in the morning.

"Why! It's a lemon custard pie! Of all things!" cried Barbara.

"In the tin dish just as it came from the oven!" added Eleanor, laughing.

"Not quite like it was when it came from the oven, for such a shaken up mess of meringue and custard we never had at *our* table!" laughed Polly,

seeing the condition of the pie from the shaking and falling it had had when Choko went over the cliff.

"Any one want a slab?" asked Anne, laughing also.

"No, thanks! Maybe, if I was famished, I'd eat the crust, but it doesn't appeal to me now!" said Polly.

"Well, I say, keep it until to-morrow! We may be glad to eat it in the morning if we are very hungry! It won't hurt to save it, anyway!" said sensible Eleanor.

So Anne sat the pie-plate down where she was, intending to put it on the ledge when she got up from supper.

"Reckon I'll put some more pine on the fires!" said Polly, seeing the flames were dying down.

She had raked up and replenished one fire, and was attending to the other when a blood-curdling cry came from the edge of the cliff, causing Polly to jump back and clutch at Anne's arm.

"Mercy! How that frightened me!" said Polly, trying to laugh her fears away.

The other girls were trembling too, and Anne said, "It was a wolf, wasn't it?"

"No, it was the cry of a panther! They wait

and wait in quiet for a long time to get a chance at their prey, then if something interferes, they make that awful cry!"

"Oh, Polly! Can he get in, do you think?" wailed Barbara.

"I reckon not! But weren't we lucky to have all that pine for the fires! It's the best thing to keep him away!" said Polly, creeping out again to see if both fires were doing their duty.

Another howl reached the girls, and Eleanor said in a shaky voice, "He won't jump over the fires, will he, Polly?"

"No, smoke and sparks frighten wild beasts from the vicinity. They know from instinct that forest fires kill and they are wary of them. But they haven't the sense to know that a man-made fire is built on purpose to keep them away!"

"It must be awful late, Polly! If you think everything is safe, suppose we go to bed," Anne suggested after a long interval unbroken by any howls.

"All right! Let Bob and Nolla take the last two beds, while you and I take these in front. I'll use this one where I can watch the ledge going up to the slope. If I see anything suspicious, I'll shoot!" said Polly, examining the rifle and standing it by the side of the green-bough bed.

"For comfort's sake, girls, unbutton your clothes and remove your shoes. They can be dried by the fires to-night so they will feel better in the morning," advised Anne.

The pine fires were burning beautifully, and Anne, completely tired out, was soon asleep. Barbara and Eleanor had succumbed to weariness the moment they rolled over on the beds. But Polly, tired and fatigued, too, knew that some one must keep the fires going all night, so she merely reclined on the pine-bough bed and started up at every sound or crackle of the fires. She piled pine upon them all night through until the first faint gleams of dawn, and then there was no more wood on hand to use.

She worried over the fact that the pine had given out and just as she turned from the fires, having deposited the last small kindlings she had found lying about, she heard the yelping of the mountain-lion and the deep growl of a grizzly bear.

She ran and caught up the rifle, planning to shoot up at the cliff in a venture to frighten them away. She aimed, pulled the trigger, and the rifle-shot rang out making the echoes roar and roll through the chasm as if an army was shooting.

The three girls who had been sleeping, jumped out of the spruce beds and screamed with fright. Barbara ran madly over the ground, back and forth, not certain where to hide. Eleanor stood shivering and Anne rushed over to ask Polly what had happened. Polly explained in a whisper, and Eleanor, as in a trance, watched her sister running about with something that seemed to cleave to her foot closer than a porous-plaster. Finally, Eleanor came to her senses and ran over to keep Barbara from rolling under the burros for hiding.

"For the love of Mike! What's all over your foot?" cried Eleanor, dragging Barbara out from the "finger-stall" to exhibit her foot to the other girls.

At sound of the unexpected shot, Barbara had jumped up frantically and darted hither and thither, taking little heed of where she ran. Now, as her companions gazed at that foot exposed by Eleanor, they all laughed hysterically while Anne shouted:

"Oh, our *custard pie!*"

And sure enough. Lemon meringue clung tenaciously to as much of a nicely-formed foot and lower limb as it possibly could. In spite of the fears over wild animals, the adventurers had to laugh at the sight.

"*How* will I ever get it off?" wailed Barbara, when she realized how sticky the custard was.

"Rather ask: 'How shall we dispense with our breakfast?'" retorted Anne.

But another mad howl from without now made the horses cry and quiver with dread, while the girls blanched in fear. Polly had not told them that the wood was used up, and now Anne ran to carry an extra armful of pine to replenish the fires. When she discovered the truth of the situation, she slowly turned and exchanged a meaning look with Polly.

But Polly now bent suddenly forward and intently eyed something she saw on the verge of the ledge above. She kept her eyes focused there, and carefully felt for and caught up her rifle. She silently lifted it, took aim, and fired!

A gleam of red and a spurt of blue came from the mouth of the gun even as the sharp report cracked the echoes in the gully. Instantly following the shot, a wild howling as of fifty beasts fighting, made Polly shoot again. Snarls and yelps followed, until Polly heard the clamor grow fainter until all was quiet once more.

"Well, girls! As long as we are fully awake, suppose we forage for breakfast and make an early start!" said Anne.

"Can we get away, do you think, Polly?" asked Eleanor.

"Yes, it's a clear morning and it doesn't take long for the snow to melt, once it gets started!" replied Polly.

"Have you enough ammunition to load again in case of need?" questioned Anne.

"Yes, I always look after that! But I was wondering what we can have for breakfast?"

"Ha! Leave that to the cook!" laughed Anne, going to the ledge and reaching up behind a crevice in the rocky wall. She brought forth one of the small fish spared from the night before.

"Good for you, Anne! If you could only dig up some sandwiches as readily!" laughed Polly.

"Maybe I can do that too, if you will look after the horses and burros!" said Anne, taking a small newspaper bundle from behind her spruce bed.

When opened, it showed that Anne had stolen some of the oats from the feed. This she rolled between two stones until it was crushed. Then she told Eleanor to pick out as many of the husks as possible.

"She's going to give us Rolled Oats, as I live!" laughed Eleanor.

Polly smiled for she was surprised to find Anne

could prepare a feast in the wilderness; and soon the oatmeal was cooking beside the fish-pan.

"How can you girls enjoy that awful stuff without sugar or cream?" asked Barbara, plaintively.

"We're eating ours without a grumble, but I notice, you are also eating yours and doing all the complaining!" retorted Eleanor.

"I have to eat it to keep from starving, still I can't enjoy it as you seem to, Nolla. I declare, you seem to be getting awfully common in your tastes."

"Huh! Show me a selection of food for breakfast!" laughed Eleanor, smacking her lips over the last spoonful of oats.

"What shall we do about feeding the animals?" asked Eleanor, as they got up from the ground to pack up the pans and other stuff waiting to be taken back home.

"We'll stop at the first good Park and let them graze for an hour or two. Then a good drink from a stream will fix them all right!" said Polly, glancing at Noddy, who had come from her stall and stood looking sleepily at the girls.

"Doesn't Noddy look for all the world like a sleepy child who has to get up for school, but who hates to be disturbed!" laughed Anne, as

Noddy's tousled head bobbed up and down while she sniffed the air redolent with oatmeal.

Satisfied that something was cooking for her breakfast, Noddy ran over and nozzled at the girls, who laughed and tried to push her cold nose away.

The other burros and horses came out then, and Polly said, "It makes me feel selfish to eat their oats but then they can eat grass in the park and we can't!"

"Girls! Aren't you going to have another look at the gold-mine before you leave here?" asked Barbara.

"What for? It won't do us any good and only waste time," replied Polly.

"Maybe you can find some more nuggets to carry back!" ventured Barbara.

"We have all we need to claim the rights of the mine, so why lug any more than we need?" returned Polly.

"Come on, Poll! Let's pack up and be going!" said Eleanor, decisively.

So, with the animals saddled and the panniers packed, the cave-dwellers started carefully along the ledge towards the slope.

It was an invigorating morning, and the sun

with its rays was just topping the tips of the pines, when the girls rode forth to climb the slope.

"Not a sign of that awful storm!" said Anne, amazed.

"Only in the glades and ravines, where the snow has drifted into heaps! Even that will melt rapidly, as the warmth of the day is felt," said Polly, looking eagerly about as she rode.

"Polly, what do you suppose became of those wild animals?" asked Eleanor, riding directly behind Polly.

"That is just what I am looking for. I thought maybe I could see some tracks, for I was sure I got that panther when I took aim and shot!"

"Well, I'm going over near that edge of the cliff and see if there is any sign of blood or tracks!" declared Eleanor.

"No, no! You stop right here with us, Nolla!" cried Barbara, anxiously.

"I'm going over myself, Bob, because I am curious to see why both of them should slink away so quickly. A mountain-lion seldom leaves a possible victim until he has been gorged, and it was strange that he should go without having tried to get at us!" said Polly.

"Oh, Polly! *Please* don't talk of such grue-

some things! I am so glad we will soon be back in civilization!" said Barbara.

The horses reached the top of the slope and Polly guided Noddy across the rough place to the cliff, where the fight had taken place.

Here she sought for some track or sign of the fight, but saw only a few small spots of red in the white snow.

Eleanor tried to make her burro follow after Noddy, but he was fractious and would not go near the cliff. He made a détour, however, about a small group of trees and just as he came opposite them, something upon the snow-drift at the base of the largest tree, caused him to shy violently.

"Oh, girls! Run! Come here and see what's here," cried Eleanor, excitedly, jumping from her burro but remembering to hold the bridle.

The burro backed and refused to go nearer the thing, but Polly rode Noddy over and saw that Eleanor had discovered one of the victims of the fight.

"Ha! I thought so!" said Polly, with satisfaction.

Noddy was left to watch from a comfortable vantage point, while her mistress ran up to the large panther which was stretched out at the foot

of the tree. He had tried to climb it in order to escape the grizzly's claws.

"Isn't he a massive beast!" cried Anne, watching from her horse some distance away.

"You girls come back! He may not be dead!" shrieked Barbara, the moment she saw the animal.

"Say, Bob, if he wasn't dead, he'd have had me down long before you came along to warn us!" laughed Eleanor.

"Polly, he's a beauty, even if he is such a terror, isn't he?" said Eleanor, admiring the satiny coat and beautiful form of the large mountain-lion, so majestic in death.

"I never saw a larger one! He must be at least nine feet long from nose to tip of tail!" said Polly, lifting the tail with her foot, then letting it drop again.

She stooped over looking closely at the wounds made by the grizzly, then she suddenly cried out, "Oh! I thought that shot hit him! It must have been that first shot from the rifle that sent him back from the cliff. Then, the bear tracked him and had the fight back here in the forest. That is when we heard the sounds diminishing.

"Well, old fellow, I'm sorry it had to be so! But you decreed it! It was you or one of us, and

I preferred to have had it you! Old Grizzly wouldn't be so cattish about sneaking up and laying low for us until the fire died down, or till one of us happened to step out of the circle of light! He would have made a big noise from the beginning and pounced down upon us willy-nilly. And now he has given you yours!"

As Polly spoke, she stood looking regretfully at the creature, as if she wished the world was ordered otherwise than all the killing and taking, one from another, in the vain belief of living!

"Polly, how much do you think he weighs?" asked Eleanor eagerly.

"Too much to drag home—if that is why you asked!" laughed Polly, looking up at Eleanor, with a wise shake of the head.

"To tell the truth, that is exactly what I planned to do until I saw how big he was!" laughed Eleanor.

"He must weigh at least two hundred pounds, Nolla," said Anne, who had come nearer during the examination.

"Yes, nearer two hundred and fifty pounds, I reckon," said Polly.

"I wanted to ship him to Chicago and show all of my society friends what *we* killed during my mountain visit!" explained Eleanor.

"Your motive killed the project before you saw him," said Anne, wagging her head at Eleanor as a rebuke.

Eleanor laughed merrily. "Well, I intend having a regular exhibit when I get back! All kinds of wild things will be shown my friends. I propose having Polly and Noddy sitting upon a pedestal in the drawing-room as a sample of the wildest things on the Rockies!" laughed Eleanor, giving Polly an affectionate glance.

"Oh, Nolla, don't talk so foolishly! As if Polly would come to Chicago! What would she do with herself while we had to entertain?" said Barbara, pettishly, but no one hearkened.

"Maybe we can blaze a trail from here to the nearest ranch on our way home, and send some one from there to come and cart the brute home for us. I'd pay him well!" said Eleanor, not willing to forego the pleasure of showing the lion at home.

"Oh, but then, you will make these ranchers curious. Once this far, they will look about the place where we spent the night, and that will lead them to discover the mine!" said Polly.

"I forgot that! Of course it would be foolish to give any one the slightest clew to our ever being here, and of what we did while here! I see I

shall have to say good-by to the lion I hoped to be lionized for!" said Eleanor, laughingly.

"With a gold mine as rich as yours, you'll be lionized without the lion!" laughed Anne.

"By the way, did you bring your nugget, Polly?" asked Eleanor.

"Reckon I did!"

"Then before we leave, don't you think we ought to make some sort of a plan, or mark the spot so we can find it again? We don't want to make the same mistake old Montresor did, you know!" said Eleanor, anxiously.

"I have a plan all made. I did it while sitting by the fire this morning, before you girls were awake," said Polly, taking off her hat and removing a folded paper.

The girls were surprised at the accuracy of the sketch, and Anne said, "Any one can find it from these directions!"

"Thank you, but you see, it would be hazardous to risk any one else coming here. The importance of keeping the whole adventure a profound secret until we have duly filed papers and can claim right of ownership to the claim, can be seen now. I hardly think it wise to speak of the crevice or danger of a land-slide until after we get

some inside information about taking hold of the mine," said Polly, seriously.

An hour more was used by Polly in staking a legal claim and marking the corners with heaps of stone. She also left a very deep blaze in each of the four trees that cornered the large square area she thought would cover the cavern.

Noddy soon found the Top Notch Trail when they were again on the way homeward. By riding steadily all morning, they reached the spot where the rattle-snake was waiting for transportation. Anne and the others had experienced so many greater shocks since the killing of the reptile that they felt no qualms about carrying the snake now.

When the four riders finally turned in on the Pebbly Pit Trail, it was past four o'clock. They had been going steadily since morning, without food or rest, excepting the hour they had to stop at the falls to give the animals grass and water, and the girls were the sorriest-looking lot as they dragged up the road to the house and stopped at the porch.

CHAPTER XVI

A YOUNG STRANGER IN OAK CREEK

"GLORY be! You-all war givin' Mis' Brewster fits wid no sign of hide nor hair sence yister-morn!" cried Sary, rushing out of the kitchen door, the moment she heard the horses hoof-beats.

Mrs. Brewster heard Sary and also ran out, crying, "Oh, my dear children! We've had such a day! Sam just went to the barn to hook up and start the ranchers on a hunt! A trapper rode in this morning and spoke of the awful blizzard that hit Top Notch Trail. Of course, we knew you couldn't find *that* or we'd have been still more worried!"

The girls looked at each other and laughed aloud. Mrs. Brewster shrewdly guessed the truth.

"*Did* you find it? And where under the sun did you hide during that awful storm?" cried she, anxiously.

Sary paid no attention to a recital of trails and

storms, however, for it was half past four and Jeb would have to take care of the five mounts before he could hope to come in for supper, and spend a quiet evening with her. So, to prevent any delay, she turned to Polly.

"You-all 'pear to be tuckered out! Jest flop inter the cheers an' rest whiles Ah carry the hosses to th' barn. Ah'll tell Mr. Brewster like-ez-how you-all come home, an' spared him a trip!"

Mrs. Brewster objected to the offer for she wanted Sary to finish the preparations for supper and give her time to talk with the girls. Sary, however, paid no attention to her mistress's objections but gathered all the reins together and led the animals to the barn.

Shortly after the girls had gone indoors to drink some hot milk—for Mrs. Brewster said hot milk would take most of the fatigue out of their bodies—Sam Brewster ran down the path from the barn, and burst into the living-room.

"Well, say! Ah shore am glad to see you-all back home! Ah just was preparing to wire some detectives to be on the lookout in the Zoo for any lions or bears lately come in who looked unusually well-fed!"

Every one was so delighted at the reunion that Mr. Brewster's foolishness made them laugh

merrily. He hugged Polly until she cried for breath, then he shook hands over and over again with Anne and the girls, Mrs. Brewster, remonstrating meantime, that she wanted to hear of their adventures!

The girls were so eager to tell about the cavern of gold that they refused to wash and dress, or remove any stains of the climb, until after the whole story was told.

Mr. and Mrs. Brewster thought it was the tale of the trip and the trials throughout the blizzard, and they cared little for what had passed as long as all were safe and happy again. But Polly blurted out the truth to make them listen.

"I found Montresor's gold mine, Paw!"

It hit the mark! In the shock the news made upon the Brewsters, no one noticed Polly's slip on the old pet title. After a long tense period of silence, however, Sam Brewster said: "Daughter, it can't be true!"

"'Tis, though, Mr. Brewster! Polly and I crawled through the tunnel until we came out into that marvelous cavern of gold," and Eleanor sighed audibly as she thought of that sight.

"What cavern! You-all must be clean locoed with the blizzard and the long ride!" cried Mr. Brewster, testily.

The girls laughed appreciatively, for they understood just how those who remained at home would feel at such news!

So Polly sat upon her father's knee and told him the story of the mine, from the time Choko fell over the cliff until they left the panther at the foot of the tree.

"And here's the plan and claim, and there's the gold!"

Polly drew the nuggets from her dress and took the papers from her sombrero, and placed them in her father's hands.

Mrs. Brewster dropped upon her knees to the floor to look at the map and the ore, while her husband was examining the large nugget. The four girls had no idea how anxious they were about this ore until they saw Mr. Brewster carefully looking it over with the eye of an expert miner.

His first words were a decided shock.

"Ah wouldn't set much store about this mine, girls! You-all don't see what Ah see in this discovery. It's gold—yes, it looks to me like red-gold of good quality, and if it is as you say—a cavern exposed so any one can value it off-hand, so much the better! But, the end of Top Notch Trail, where you doubtless spent the night, is a

far haul from Oak Creek, and the chasm in front, and the mountain on top, are drawbacks to mining. However, we will ride into Oak Creek in the morning and file this claim of yours and see if it comes anywhere near to being the one old Montresor left, Polly. It would give me the keenest joy to be able to say something to a few of the mean old rascals about Oak Creek, who called me a fool for paying the funeral costs and filing the claim of that kind old man, Montresor!"

"But, Dad—father! If this mine happens to cross the claim staked by Mr. Montresor, will it interfere with our filing a new claim?" asked Polly, anxiously.

"It depends on how much ground you covered with your corners!" replied her father.

"You can depend upon it, I covered all I could think might come within a mile of gold!" laughed Polly.

"Well, girls, listen to some good advice on this! Not a word to be said about this cave—not even among yourselves until the claim is filed and investigated! You see, the walls have ears when any one speaks of gold! Then, having attended to the legal aspects of the mine, we will all ride over to remain a few days, as visitors to Old Mr.

Grizzly! When we get back we ought to have some information worth while!"

"And what about sending for John's friend to come and go with us? If he knew enough to tell you about the lava, he will surely be able to judge about the gold!" ventured Polly, eagerly.

"I think that is a splendid idea, Sam! When we go in to Oak Creek to-morrow, let us send John a day-letter explaining about this cavern," added Mrs. Brewster.

"Hain't you-all comin' to supper? Har hev Ah ben and wukked all day hopin' fer a night off to-night!" said Sary, suddenly appearing at the doorway between the living-room and the kitchen.

Every one started for she had not made a sound before speaking, so no one knew how much she had over-heard. Mrs. Brewster quickly replied, however.

"Why, Sary! I didn't know you wished to go out! I could have attended to supper myself, had you asked me!"

"Ah hain't planned to go out—Ah said a 'night off,' Mis' Brewster," said Sary, hardly deigning to wait for an answer, but looking at the girls with an impatient frown.

"Mother, we really must wash before supper!" said Polly.

Sary tossed her head. Mrs. Brewster knew what that meant, so she urged the girls to forego any lengthy toilets and merely wash away the worst signs of travel.

Sary was pacified when Eleanor came out of the room and handed her a large paper bundle.

"Sary, I have a little present for you because we made so much trouble to-night."

"Oh, Miss Nolla, Ah'm much obleeged t' you-all. Ah don' mind trouble, onny yoh see Ah expec' comp'ny to-night."

It took Sary but an instant to open the package and when she beheld a ruffled organdy dress discarded by Barbara the previous season and accidentally packed in the trunk with other clothes, she rolled her eyes heavenward.

"Miss Nolla! Is this fine gown'd fer me?"

Eleanor stifled a laugh but Sary made as if she would clasp the girl in her powerful arms, so discretion was needed. Eleanor backed behind the kitchen chair.

"Miss Nolla, Ah wonder ef a widder of seven months' standin' mought wear little yaller rosebuds on a dress, like-ez-how this is?"

"Certainly, Sary," came from Mrs. Brewster, who now joined the two. "It's not the color or

quantity of clothes as much as the sincerity of one's mourning."

Quite unintentionally, Mrs. Brewster touched upon a tender spot. In fact, so tender was it, that Sary blamed Bill for having died so recently instead of two years back. She might have now been ending her second year of mourning!

Eleanor being trained to the wiles of polite society, saw and understood Sary's flash of resentment, so she turned to Mrs. Brewster with the remark:

"I've heard said, that the highest regard a widow can pay her departed, is, to take a second husband. It speaks well for her happiness with the first one, you see."

Mrs. Brewster stared at Eleanor but Sary smirked and quickly replied:

"You-all is right, Miss Nolla! A widder what hez ben *so* happy that she gits lonesome whiles thinkin' of her departed, hez a right t' find a second husban'."

Mrs. Brewster choked a laugh as she saw the sublime look in the "help's" eyes, and hurried out. Eleanor then suggested:

"Now you run away and beautify yourself, Sary, and I will wash the dishes to-night."

Sary needed no second invitation and in another moment she had disappeared to her "boudoir" back of the buttery.

Eleanor was as good as her word, for she was soon busy with dish-water and mop, rattling the china, and banging pans about as if noise and bustle were sure signs of hard work and energy. Polly laughed as she cleared away the remains of the meal and then caught up a towel to dry the dishes. As they worked the two girls talked.

"Poll, now that you have this gold mine, what will you do with all the wealth that is yours?" asked Eleanor.

Polly held a decorated plate in front of her face to hide her smile, and pretended to be looking for grease on its surface. When she had straightened her face again, she said: "Oh, I'm going away to school, first of all. I'm not so sure that I want to stay in Denver, now that you have told me all about Chicago. I'll write for catalogues of schools there; and then I can see John quite often during the school year."

"Just what I would have suggested, Poll! Then you can live at home with me. Dad and you and I will have the best times!"

To accentuate her approval of Polly's premature plans, Eleanor swished the dish-mop wildly

up and down in the soapy water, but the suds flew up lightly, as soapsuds will, and a bubble burst in Polly's eye.

"Oo-h! Stop throwing dish water in my face, Nolla!" cried Polly, with eyes screwed shut and one free hand trying to rub the smarting lye from her eye.

"I never did, Polly! It must have splashed accidentally when I was washing the pan."

"You have done nothing since you began the dishes, but rattle and swash that mop about in the pan as if you were mining the ore from the cave," complained Polly, as she managed to open her eyes again.

"I suppose it is because we are so excited over the find, and all it means for you, Polly," explained Eleanor, contritely.

"It doesn't mean much more, now, than before. The thing I am most happy over, is that Old Man Montresor will be vindicated, and people will stop jeering at me, and at what they called his locoed ideas."

The conversation was interrupted at this moment by the appearance of Sary. She first poked her head from the partly opened door of her room and then said: "Is any one about to see me?"

Polly turned to make sure that they were alone in the kitchen, and Eleanor replied: "No, what is it, Sary?"

Then the maid stepped forth and such a vision! She had curled her red hair on a pair of old-fashioned tongs. The curling irons were but a quarter of an inch in diameter and they were heated by thrusting them into the living embers of the kitchen fire. When Sary drew the comb through her scanty tresses they took on the appearance of carrot-colored cotton threads which had just been ripped out of an old garment—so crinkly and frizzed were the strands of hair.

The flowered organdy dress that Eleanor had given Sary to wear for the great occasion of receiving a caller, was much too small for the buxom widow, and she was in great distress about it. This brought her out to ask advice of the girls.

"Why bother to wear the dress, Sary, until you have had time to alter it for yourself?" asked Polly.

"Why, Polly! Ah has to keep up my looks now that comp'ny is lookin' my way again. Ef you-all hadn't such fine city gals at home, what wears th' latest fashions so that Jeb can't help but see what's what, Ah woulden' have to worry so much about looks. But a woman has to keep

up when other women set the pace, 'specially ef she is a widow, like-as-how Ah am now."

Eleanor laughed appreciatively and said: "Sary is just like Bob, when it comes to that! It is the eternal feminine, Poll, that drives both Bob and Sary to the verge of tears, because they cannot catch their beaux with their good looks."

Sary smirked self-consciously at Eleanor's words, for she thought she was being coupled with Barbara and her attractions. Sary felt quite sure that she was good-looking and winsome, but she had to hear Eleanor's words to make her believe she was fascinating.

"If I was Sary, I'd wear a nice clean blouse and a linen skirt. It would be far more comfortable than that awfully tight gown," remarked Polly.

But the help scorned such simplicity and turned to Eleanor for further advice about her appearance. The latter, wise in her years, turned her head on one side and appeared to be debating.

"Seems to me, Sary, that putting on that organdy just as it is, without fixing it over a bit, may make Jeb suspicious of its not being made for you. He may even go so far as to wonder if Bob handed it down to you. Now you do not want him to dream that you did not have it made

to order for yourself, so why not take it off until you can remodel it to fit yourself, like new?"

Sary pondered this suggestion for a few moments, and then said: "Ah ain't got no fancy dress to wear, onny this, Miss Nolla. Ef Ah puts on my black alpaky, he'll remember 'bout Bill, and sech memories allus dampen a man's plans to pop th' question."

Both girls had to laugh outright at the unexpected confession; but Sary was in a serious frame of mind and paid no attention to their merriment. She resumed her interrupted explanation.

"It's jest this way, in Oak Crick country, you-all see! Single men ain't growin' on every bush, and a widder has a hard time of it, anyway, when most ranchers' dawters are waitin' to snap up a likely catch. Jeb's a catch, Ah says. He ain't a gallavantin' dude, ner he ain't spendin' all his wages on gamblin' at Red Mike's saloon. Ah've learned like-as-how being right on th' spot when a man's willin' to be cotched, is more'n half the fight to hook him. Ah kin afford to snap mah fingers at all them ranch gals about Oak Crick, tryin' their bestes to make Jeb wink his eye at 'em, jus' because Ah *am* whar Ah am keepin' tabs on him, all his time."

When the laughter caused by these words had

subsided, somewhat, the two girls replied: Polly to advise and Eleanor to make a giggling explanation.

Eleanor said: "You make a wonderfully accurate time-clock on Jeb's comings and goings, Sary."

And Polly advised: "You run back to your room, Sary, and put on a sensible dress to keep Jeb from wondering how much of his earnings it would take to dress you in fine clothes like that organdy gown cost."

"Thar's somethin' in that, too, Polly! Ah reckon you're right, so Ah'll throw on that striped shirt-waist your Maw gave me, and the duck skirt with the tucks in it."

Sary vanished as quickly as she had appeared, and the two girls stood laughing as they saw the bed-room door close. Then they dried the dish-pan, hung up the towels and mop, and turned to go back to the living-room where Sam Brewster and his wife were planning for the ride to Oak Creek on the next day, and the trip up to the cave, on the day following that.

But the girls had not reached the living-room door before a "hist" halted them. They turned in the direction of the sound and saw Jeb's small head at the kitchen door. When he saw that he

had gained their attention, he beckoned furtively with a horny index finger.

Both girls tip-toed over to hear what news he had to impart, for his behavior denoted some dread secret.

"Is Sary Dodd hangin' 'round?" he whispered, anxiously.

"She's in her room getting ready for company," was Eleanor's amused reply.

"Wall, you-all kin do me a big favor ef you-all explain like-as-how Ah was too sick to come in, to-night. She tol' me Ah jus' had to call on her, to-night, but Ah ain't got courage. Ah kin see jus' whar all this callin' and sittin' alone of evenin's, is goin' to land me. Sary Dodd's got a powerful way for a woman, and Ah ain't no marryin' man—am Ah, Polly?"

Jeb's plaintive tone and his beseeching eyes convulsed Eleanor with the desire to laugh, but Polly saw how serious he was, in his fear of being caught by a woman's wiles, and she replied:

"No, Jeb; you are not a marrying man, I can say that much. And Sary ought to know better than to lure you on with all her past experiences of mankind."

Polly's earnest explanation made Eleanor lose control of herself and she sat down in a kitchen

chair and laughed so heartily that Sary hurried forth. Jeb instantly ducked and tried to lose himself in the dense darkness of the out-of-doors, but Sary was too quick for him.

She darted to the door, called him with an imperative voice, and brought the recreant back to his duty of calling. Then she turned to the two girls, and said calmly, but with meaning:

"Ah'se much obliged fer th' dish-washin'. Ah'll see that the kitchen is set to rights fer the evenin'."

With this dismissal, Polly and Eleanor had to go, and laughing still, they went through the living-room door to join the others who sat about the round table figuring and planning.

Sary very quietly closed the door between the two rooms, and Eleanor whispered to Polly: "Poor Jeb! We had to leave him to his fate, after all."

By six o'clock the next morning, the riders were on the way to Oak Creek. Polly and Eleanor rode side by side and discussed a good name for the claim. After suggesting and rejecting many fine sounding names, Polly finally chuckled gleefully.

"You've thought of one!" declared Eleanor.

"Yes, just the thing! Won't 'Choko's Find' suit it?"

"Great! And it was little Choko that found it, too. If he hadn't fallen over the cliff we never would have discovered the cave and the rest of it."

"We'll call it that—'Choko's Find!' Say, everybody! Listen to this: The mine is going to be called 'Choko's Find'—do you like it?" called Polly to the other riders.

"Very appropriate," was the answer, so "Choko's Find" was its name.

Reaching Oak Creek, the party rode to Mr. Simm's office and Mr. Brewster told the story in detail. The attorney was completely silenced at the strangeness of the adventure but demanded proof in seeing the ore before he would credit the tale.

"Well, Ah declare! If this isn't the derndest thing Ah ever heard of in my life!" exclaimed Mr. Simms as he examined the nuggets.

"Simms, do you remember Montresor's nuggets and legacy?" asked Mr. Brewster.

The lawyer looked quickly up at his questioner and a look of understanding crept into his eyes. "Sam, Ah reckon it is the same!"

"The ledge, the canyon, the trails *and* the river!" added Mr. Brewster, convincingly.

"You-all just wait here till Ah get my papers from the Bank vault!" excitedly cried the lawyer, snatching his cap and running out of the office.

"Simms keeps his valuable papers in the masoned safe at the bank, you know. If the town burns down during a miners' celebration some night, his papers will be safe, anyway," explained Mr. Brewster.

The lawyer soon returned with a package held closely under his arm. He sat down and opened the papers before his visitors.

"Here's th' rough plan of the claim and here's Montresor's letter that was found after he was buried—you know, Sam."

"What letter is that, Father?" wondered Polly.

"We never told you about it, as it wouldn't have helped any one then, but now you shall read it."

"Where was it found?"

"In the pocket of an old hunting coat when we tried to find some clew to his family and home address. But the top of the letter had been torn away so we never knew for whom it was meant."

Polly took the closely written sheet and read the letter penned by her old friend on the mountains.

"At last I can say to you all, that my education

was not wasted as you claimed. I have made good! I am a rich, rich man, as I write these words. I have discovered a gold mine that will prove to be worth millions. I refrained from writing as you had requested, until I had *good* news. Now I can write.

"In the years I have spent on these mountains, I felt sure I would strike gold, as every sign in rock and sand formation, of the sides of the peaks, are favorable to gold deposits. To-day I proved my mining education to be of some worth, for it helped to guide me to a ledge where the red-gold is so rich that it seems to run deep into the rocks, yet quite easy to mine.

"I had great difficulty in reaching the place and, afterwards, when darkness fell over the place, I had to trust to the horse to find a spot to camp. I left my claims staked out and marked as we used to do in the Klondike, and to-morrow morning I shall ride directly to Oak Creek to file the papers and have an assay on the ore. I am now writing by the light of the camp-fire with grizzlies prowling about and panthers howling to get at me and the horse. But my ring of fire is security for us.

"I haven't the slightest idea of where this camp is but I will scout around in the morning and then

write you again after I return from my trip to Oak Creek.

"You must understand how happy I am, to be able to pay off my obligations and take my rightful place in the world with my family. God grant that this blessing of wealth bestowed upon me after all these years of separation and disgrace, charged against me, who am innocent, will be the last of my sufferings. I have never heard from the traitorous friend who caused me this ruin, and now it matters little!"

Polly looked up at this point and said:

"He must have finished this after the land-slide, Daddy."

"Yes, daughter: read on and you will see," replied Mr. Brewster, gently.

"The curse still pursues me. I have not written to conclude this letter since the night I started it, as hard luck again is my lot.

"I filed the claim and showed the ore but different laws prevail in Colorado, and I found I must register the nearest survey corners and sections to my mine to obtain a legal ownership; however my plans and specifications were sufficient to protect me from claim-jumpers.

"That afternoon, a storm came over the moun-

tains and lasted three days. It blew, and poured, and snowed, until it seemed as if all the furies in Hades were let loose. Then it cleared again and I started out with my dog and horse to visit my mine and make satisfactory corners and plans for filing.

"A great land-slide had occurred during that storm and the entire mountain-side was changed. Canyons, cliffs, and mine are gone. Wiped away as if they had never existed. Of course, I know the gold is still there but buried under tons of earth and trash. It will take longer and cost more to unearth, that is all.

"But I will have to locate the place anew as I have no bearings to work from, so I propose starting from Top Notch Trail and have Patsy help me find it on the down-side, as near as I can remember from the camping-spot of that night where I first wrote this letter:

"I am reserving this until I find the mine, then I will mail it at once. Now that I have definite grounds to work on, my enthusiasm is equal to carry me through any difficulties in my pathway."

"Oh, father, how sad!" wept Polly, handing the letter to Anne, to read to the other two girls.

"We know the rest, Polly. And that is why we never had you read this. Now that we can prove the poor old man was sane, we will try to establish his reputation for all concerned," said Mr. Brewster.

"Why didn't you try to find his family when he died?" asked Polly, frowning at what she considered an oversight.

"We did. Every newspaper of reputation carried an advertisement, but Ah think, now, that the old man assumed another name than his rightful one. That is why we never had a reply to our ads," replied Mr. Simms.

Eleanor was elated at the romance of this experience, and turned to Polly, exclaiming:

"Oh, Poll! S'posing we meet Montresor's son some day, and you fall in love with him without knowing who he is! Then it will all come out when he visits your parents to ask for you, and he will get his share of the mine, anyway!"

Anne laughed heartily at such nonsense but Polly rather favored such an ending, so her mother and father quickly interrupted the romance by saying:

"Come, come, sign papers and wind up this affair!"

Mr. Simms said the assay was more than satis-

factory, and "Choko's Find" was filed as the discovery of "Marybelle Brewster, daughter of Sam and Mary Brewster of Pebbly Pit."

"Who's Marybelle Brewster?" wondered Eleanor, surprised.

"It's me, but no one knows it!" laughed Polly.

"Sam, when do you reckon you-all ought to go back to the mine and investigate?" said Mr. Simms.

"We-all plan to ride there early in the morning. Will you-all try to come with us?"

"Ah'd like it first-rate. Ah haven't had my regular fishing trip this year and this will answer," replied Simms, eagerly.

"Then be shore to meet us at seven or eight o'clock at the Pine Tree just by the corduroy roadway," said Mr. Brewster.

"Sam, better get away before that! We won't be the only riders along Top Notch trail the moment this 'find' gets wind!" warned Simms.

"He's right, Sam! Let's start from the farm at day-break and meet Mr. Simms at five or six," advised Mrs. Brewster.

"Right! Make it six, Simms, and see if the coroner and sheriff want an outing." Mr. Brewster's voice sounded interesting.

Just as the lawyer opened the door for the

ladies to leave, a handsome young man of about eighteen came down the road. It was evident, in every way, that he was a "tenderfoot" newly arrived. Probably just came in on the noon local from Denver.

"I'm looking for Carew's Camp, sir. That cowboy over at the box-car said you might tell me how to reach it."

"Oh, that's the surveyin' crew for the government. Ah reckon you'll have quite a jaunt afore night to reach there. They're working about twenty mile from here—up on the Yellow Jacket Pass road," replied Simms, studying the surprised face closely.

"Ah saw Carew's driver stopping at Jake's when we drove by, Simms," said Mr. Brewster at this moment.

"If you-all can find Jake, that will be the way to arrive—take a reserved seat beside him," chuckled Simms.

The youth was shy before so many pretty girls, so he took off his cap to acknowledge the obligation, and would have backed away had not Simms asked a very strange question.

"Young man, you look exactly like an old friend I knew in these parts, some years back. So like, that I must ask you your name."

The stranger flushed and stammered: "I am Kenneth Evans, from New York."

Simms frowned when he heard the name and turned to Sam Brewster: "Did you ever see anything to beat that likeness to the man we were just talking about?"

Polly had noticed the resemblance as did her father, but nothing more was said at that time, as so much remained to be attended to before the ride on the morrow.

"Well, Boy, be sure to drop in and have a talk with me the next time you are in town. My friend was from your way, too, and who knows but we-all can hook up a relationship, eh?" said Simms, holding out his hand to young Evans.

"I'll be glad to do that," responded Kenneth, heartily.

Mrs. Brewster's kindly heart was touched by the utter forlornness expressed in the youth's face when he heard how far away the surveyor's camp was located, so she addressed him directly.

"Did you want to reach Carew to-night, or can you come home with us and get a fresh start for camp, in the morning?"

"I was supposed to report to Carew yesterday, but I lost the train at Chicago, and that made me late all along the line of train-connec-

tions," explained young Evans, smiling more cheerfully. "I thank you just the same, for inviting me to join your circle, but I really feel that I must find this man Jake and get away."

"Well, young man," now abetted Mr. Brewster, "do as you think best, but that won't prevent you from riding over to Pebbly Pit any day you can get away from work, and having dinner with us."

The young man was surprised at such hearty hospitality shown an utter stranger, but he had heard of western generosity and he now felt that he had met such types of westerners. Just now, Mr. Simms called out quickly: "There goes Jake! Hey, *Jake!* Ah say—J-A-K-E!"

The man called Jake halted as he was crossing the muddy road, and looked towards the group which stood in front of Simms' office. Simms waved his wide-brimmed hat to denote that he was wanted, so the driver turned and slouched along the side of the road until he was within a few feet of the lawyer, before the latter explained.

"We-all got a fine young Tenderfoot here, for you, Jake, and Ah just wanted to warn you to handle him with care or these pretty gals of Pebbly Pit will call you to account for him. Boys

are scarcer than hen's teeth, since the war, you know, and our gals are having a hard time raking the country to find such a swain as young Evans."

Mr. Simms' frivolous talk made the girls smile, and Kenneth Evans began to feel more at ease. But Jake was replying to the attorney's explanation, and he listened to what was said.

"Ah come all the way from camp, yistiddy, and no kid to be seen. Then the boss sent me back to-day to meet this local train but he ain't come yet. *Now* when he shows up, he can walk to Carew's Camp, fur all I care! I'm going back, right off."

"Lookin' for a kid, eh? What sort of one is he?" teased Mr. Simms.

"Augh, Jim Latimer says he was bigger'n him, but a blondy. And he said he looked a Tenderfoot all through. I asked Red Mike if a feller stopped at his eatin' place for a snack, but Mike tole me he ain't seen no stranger in Oak Crick, this week," Jake grumbled.

"Did you say Jim Latimer?" exclaimed Eleanor, eagerly.

Jake turned to stare at the girl, and young Evans brightened visibly, then he said: "Do you know Jim?"

"Do you know him?" chorused several voices, Polly and her parents joining the chorus.

"Do I know Jim?" repeated Kenneth, laughing like his old merry self. "I should say I did! Why, Jim and I went through school together, back East, and it's Jim who got me in this Crew so I can get experience and money at the same time."

"Well, this is great!" exclaimed Sam Brewster. "You see my boy John goes to college with Tom Latimer, at Chicago, and that's how we met Jim —his brother gave him a letter of introduction to bring us when he came out here to work with Carew. I knew the Boss of the survey crew, and Jim has been over to Pebbly Pit on Sundays. So now you must get him to show you the way."

This happy discovery, of having a mutual friend, completed Kenneth's feeling of ease and confidence, and he was soon talking unrestrainedly about the Latimers—what splendid people they were. How Jim's father was trying to save his (Ken's) father from having a very valuable patent stolen by a ring of rascals in New York City. And how Mr. Latimer's brother who was a large financier on Wall Street, was financing the lawsuit, and the stock-company that was formed on the value of the patent.

During the time it took for Kenneth to enlarge on the merits of the Latimers, Jake grew restless. He shifted his weight from one cowhide booted leg to the other, and finally he heaved a doleful sigh. Then he drew attention to himself.

"Ef we-all ain't goin' to get started mighty soon, thar's no use in gettin' off, to-night. Mike gen'ally has a dance to his ristrant at night, on pay-day, and he can put us up, all right."

Mr. Brewster hurriedly took his watch from his pocket and Mr. Simms turned to look at the old banjo clock in his office, and both men quickly said in one voice: "Oh, no, Jake! You have plenty of time to get off and make camp before dark."

But the suggestion made by the driver, to stop over-night in Oak Creek, was the means of hustling Kenneth Evans along his way. The entire party walked with him, down the road, towards the shed where Jake had the lumbering camp-wagon; and there they waited while Jake drove back to the baggage room to find his passenger's trunk.

During the driver's absence, Simms explained to the young stranger why he was so anxious

about getting the man from Carew's Camp away from Oak Creek that afternoon.

"You see, my boy, these nights about this burg when the miners and cow-boys have had their pay, are one Bedlam. Decent folks lock their doors and windows and never show a light that might attract any insanely drunken miner. That's why I want you far on your road to camp before these rough foreigners come to town. Jake would revel in a wild night of it, but he'd get fired when Carew heard of it."

The young man smiled but the girls were anxious to make the most of the few minutes left before Jake returned for the Tenderfoot, so Eleanor began the moment Simms concluded.

"When do you suppose Jim Latimer and you can come to Pebbly Pit to call?"

"Never having met the Boss of the Crew, and not being acquainted with distances from camp to the ranch, I couldn't say. But Jim ought to be able to judge, and to decide on a day. We could then write you, couldn't we?"

"Don't forget, Nolla, that we have our hands full of important work on Top Notch Trail, for an indefinite time," was Polly's warning.

"Oh, I didn't forget that, but it won't keep us

busy more than a few days," returned Eleanor.

"That reminds me, Simms! Did you say you would take care of that wire to John?" asked Mr. Brewster, turning to the lawyer.

"Yes; I'll send a trustworthy man down the line when the train comes back for Denver, and he can send his message couched so that no wise guy will understand what it means, from some telegraph office a distance from Oak Creek," said Simms.

"That's a wise plan. And get him off as soon as possible so John will get the word and start home without delay," added Mrs. Brewster.

Jake drove up beside the group at this moment, and sat waiting for Kenneth to say good-by to his new friends. The girls reminded him again to be sure and have Jim bring him to the ranch and visit, as soon as it could be arranged, then the great heavy wagon rolled away with the first good-looking young man the girls had seen since they left Denver.

CHAPTER XVII

SARY'S AMBITIONS

"DEAR me!" sighed Eleanor. "That boy makes me think of civilization again."

Her companions laughed at her expression, and Polly said: "He's awfully nice, isn't he?"

"Yes, but not half as nice as Jim Latimer," added Eleanor.

"Oh, I think he is. Jim just takes everything for granted, whether you agree with him or not," rejoined Polly.

"Jim Latimer is only a child! Now his brother Tom is what I should call wonderful! Not only handsome, but desirable, as well," remarked Barbara, with more spirit than she usually showed in the younger girls' conversation.

Eleanor smiled knowingly, and said: "If Tom was poverty stricken, maybe you wouldn't find him so desirable."

"Why would any one care for a poverty-stricken friend?" asked Barbara, wonderingly. But Anne hurriedly changed the subject.

"How long do you think it might take, before John gets that message, Mr. Brewster?"

"Oh, he ought to be within hailing distance of his camp and he'd get the wire when he went for meals, or to sleep. Allowing until morning for it to reach him, and another day for him to pack up and travel, he ought to be in Oak Creek the day after to-morrow."

Every one but Simms watched Anne's face to see her blush, or smile joyously, but Simms was not aware of any tender feelings on the part of the pretty teacher for John Brewster, so he abruptly suggested a plan.

"Ah wouldn't wait around the ranch for John's coming, Sam. If the women folks are going up to Top Notch Trail with us, all well and good, but waiting about until John and the engineer gets home will be risky business for the claim. Before to-morrow, every thief in Oak Creek, and for miles around, will be wise to that gold vein, and most of them will want to sneak up there and try to jump the claim."

"Oh, no, we won't postpone going up there to guard the spot!" explained Anne, anxiously. "I was wondering how long it would take that expert engineer to arrive on the ground and render a reliable verdict about the mine."

Eleanor tittered. "Sure! That is all. Anne never dreamed that John Brewster might accompany the expert!"

"That will do from you, Nolla!" came reprovingly from Anne. But the girls all laughed at her annoyance.

Having concluded all the business necessary in connection with filing and signing papers, and arranging details about the trip back to the mine on the following day, the ranch party said good-by to Mr. Simms, and started on the long ride to Pebbly Pit.

The sole subject of conversation between the elder Brewsters and Barbara was the gold mine and the possibilities of it. The engrossing thought that kept Anne so quiet was the unexpected and imminent visit of John to Pebbly Pit. But the topic that now enthused Polly and Eleanor was the arrival of Kenneth Evans, and his acquaintance with Jim Latimer, the pleasant young man who had spent a Sunday at the ranch just before the city girls had arrived.

"I wish those boys could join our party up to the cave," remarked Eleanor to Polly, as they rode behind the others along the road to Pebbly Pit.

"So do I. But they are camping too far from

us, for that. We are almost directly opposite their camp site, using Oak Creek as a central point. But the Government Survey plans will work them along to Yellow Jacket Pass, and from that point, along the wilderness, until they reach Buffalo Park and the Top Notch Trail where we were the other day. But they won't reach that part of the work until late this season," explained Polly.

"Tom Latimer brought his younger brother Jim to see us in Chicago, when Jim was on his way west, but I never thought he would be so near me, this summer, as to be able to see him. Had I dreamed of such being the case, I would have paid more attention to him at the time. I said to myself, at that visit, 'Oh, we'll never meet again, so why waste time over him?' "

Polly laughed at Eleanor's frank confession, and added: "Well, when Tom wrote mother that his little brother would be near enough to Pebbly Pit to permit him to ride over now and then for a visit, we sent word, at once, for Carew to give him Sundays off to come and have dinner with us. But he has only been over once. Now that this friend is in camp with him, maybe he'll come oftener."

"If John would only bring Tom with him, wouldn't it be fine!" planned Eleanor. "Anne

would have her choice, John. Bob would be supremely happy if she could flirt with Tom for a time, and you and I would have Jim and Ken Evans."

Polly glanced at Eleanor in surprise, and said: "Why, Nolla! I wouldn't like that at all. It will be lots more fun if we all go about together for a good time. But John is coming to see about the mine—not to enjoy himself."

"You don't think, do you, that having Anne Stewart right in reach, that he's going to spend all his time working that mine? He's going to divide time so that more than half of it will be given to Anne. Then he'll work double-quick on the mine business to catch up on his work," was Eleanor's precocious statement.

Polly said nothing to this, as she had much food for thought given her in Eleanor's words. Rather than pursue a subject that roused her jealousy because of her brother John, she spurred her horse to gallop forward to join the others of the party.

"Father, what did you say in your telegram to John?" asked Polly, when she slowed up beside Sam Brewster.

"Simms and I had to be careful what we said, so no one on the wire would get wise as to our

real meaning, so I wrote out: 'Fine party on at the ranch. Big doings that Tom and you must be in on. Also bring your friend who came with you the time we talked about mining Rainbow Cliffs. Do not delay but start immediately, as the girls have the time of their lives set down for day after to-morrow. Don't write or wire, but come on receiving this message.' You see, that was the only way I could think of to get John off without letting others in on the secret. Every one in these parts knows the city girls are with us, and they'll not wonder at our having the boys come home for a visit."

When Sam Brewster concluded his explanation, Anne was smiling happily, and Barbara lifted her head a bit higher as she said: "How nice it will be to see Tom Latimer again. I enjoy his company *so* much!"

Eleanor could not deny herself the mean little satisfaction in saying: "Yes, Bob met him once, at our house, and *tried* to meet him several times after that, at various social gatherings in Chicago."

But Polly pinched her friend's arm for silence, as the two horses crowded close together to pass on a narrow ledge of the trail that ran up to the Cliffs.

"If Tom comes with John, and that expert engineer comes, too, mother, I don't see where we are going to put them up."

"We were planning that as we rode along, just now," said Mrs. Brewster. "I think we can put up cot-beds, temporarily, in the loft over the first barn, where father keeps his account books and other business papers. Or we can pitch the large tent under the trees over by the terrace, and they can camp there. It will be far more comfortable, in either place, than they will have up on Top Notch, or what they have been having in the movable camp with the engineers, all this summer."

"Finding sleeping quarters for the boys is the least of our worries now," laughed Sam Brewster. "Keeping off claim-jumpers and guarding the cave from miners who would steal the gold as fast as they could pick it, or blow it out of the rock, is more concern for us than any other problem, at present."

"Well, we won't lack for excitement if all you fear is justly founded, eh?" laughed Eleanor, plainly showing how thoroughly she was enjoying the experience and its promised thrills.

"Even a westerner, immune to thrills, would have a few entirely new ones in this experience,"

chuckled Mr. Brewster. "But let a few city gals like you three, and a quiet little mouse like Polly, jump right into such a game as this promises to be, and there will be nothing left for you to thrill over, after that, in everyday life."

"If only Jim Latimer and Ken Evans could be at the ranch to go with us when we start for the cave," said Eleanor for the second time. This time her remark caused Mr. Brewster to think.

Then he said: "It is queer how that boy resembled our old friend Montresor. If we only knew what part of the East Montresor came from. I have always said he was not traveling under his own name, but probably was using a family name to hide behind."

"Yes, and that may explain the reason we never had any reply to our widely circulated advertisements for his relatives," added Mrs. Brewster.

"If Montresor really was related to this young man, father, he surely would have said something when Mr. Simms mentioned the resemblance, and asked the stranger if he knew of a relative being in Colorado," said Polly.

"Montresor had white hair, it is true, but that did not say that he was an old man. He was prematurely wrinkled from worry and hardships,

but he was not much more than forty, I should say," ventured Mr. Brewster.

"What are you leading up to, Sam?" asked Mrs. Brewster.

"I was just thinking, aloud, that Montresor could have had a son as old, or as young, as this Kenneth Evans. If he had gone to the Klondike, as we believed, the boy would have been too young to remember his dad very distinctly. Who knows what drove Old Montresor away from home, to seek adventure or gold so far north as in the Klondike? He and his wife may have separated through some misunderstanding such as that letter would lead us to infer, and his eastern relatives may have kept all facts or news of him from this boy. The poor man's pride and determination to prove himself innocent of some wrong kept him from communicating with his people; we know that from his own letter. So I would not be greatly surprised if we eventually learn that Kenneth Evans is really a son of Montresor's."

"Oh, Mr. Brewster! Isn't that exactly what I said to you before, when you hushed me up!" declared Eleanor, delighted over her romantic vision.

"I hushed you up because you went on weaving stuff that dreams are made of—not because you hinted that this youth might be Montresor's son," corrected Sam Brewster.

The others laughed at Eleanor, and as they rode past the Cliffs, now glimmering faintly in the rays of the new moon rising over the edge of the old crater, Polly said with a sigh:

"Thank goodness, we are almost home in time for supper."

The materialistic craving in Polly for a good meal was so different from Eleanor's dreams of romance for her friend that the two elder Brewsters felt relieved to hear the exclamation. Soon afterwards, the riders drew rein at the porch where Jeb was awaiting the return of the party.

"Wall, did you-all find out if the mine was the same as Old Man Montresor's claim?" asked Jeb, eagerly, as they dismounted.

"What's that, Jeb?" asked Sam Brewster, frowningly.

"Why, Sary says you-all went to Oak Crick to file papers and make sure that Montresor's claim is the same mine like Polly discovered up on the Trail. Ain't it so?" wondered Jeb, curiously.

The two elder Brewsters exchanged glances, and the girls had to laugh at having been com-

pletely fooled by clever Sary Dodd. Then Mr. Brewster thought best to make a clean breast of the entire matter.

"Well, we were not sure when we left Pebbly Pit, this morning, whether this claim was good or not. So we did not say a word about it to either Sary or you, but she must have overheard us speaking about it, last night."

"Yeh—that's what she said to me. She had to wait so long fer you-all to come to supper, last night, that she coulden' help hearin' what was said. She says it will be a grand day fer her and me when you-all get this mine goin'. Sary figgers that you-all won't stay in Oak Crick, ner on a ranch, once you have all this money; 'cause Polly'll make you-all go to some fine city to live," explained Jeb, innocently.

"Huh! Is that so!" sneered Sam Brewster, angrily.

Jeb was gathering up the reins of the horses as he spoke, and now he turned to wonder at his master's tone. Mrs. Brewster was about to say something conciliatory, when Sary rushed out of the side door.

"Ah was jus' comin' to see who rode up, when Ah hearn Jeb talk. Now lissun to me, whiles Ah explains how-come Ah spoke: Me and Jeb was

sittin' over dinner, this noon, when Ah says to him, 'Ef the Brewsters plan to leave Pebbly Pit, Jeb, will you-all stay on and wuk the ranch fer 'em, or buy it outright?' Now wasn't that a most natchul thing to ask?"

Sary's apparent guilelessness made the girls stare and her mistress smile understandingly. "Of course, Sary—go on."

"Wall, then, Jeb diden' know a thing about the gold mine ner what you-all rode to Oak Crick fer, so Ah hed to explain. He was that flabbergasted! My, Ah feared he'd keel over right at table. So Ah hurried to brace him up wid puttin' an ambitious idee in his head. That's how-come Ah mentioned his takin' over Pebbly Pit."

Here Jeb interpolated: "But you-all said, Sary, that no self-respecking woman could remain on the ranch ef all the ladies left. And you told me a man needed a help-mate on such a big place."

Sary frowned down on meek little Jeb, but her displeasure was wasted, for Jeb was too earnestly concerned over his master's future plans to see the widow's expression. The girls were so intensely amused over this new development in Sary's affairs that they forgot about their own ambitions for the time being.

"Of course, Ah said that!" affirmed Sary, when

all other escape by excuses seemed vain. "Ah also said to Jeb that now he was callin' on me evenin's, and by such ways showin' the public like-as-how he was courtin' me, it was the right thing to do to marry afore you-all leave the ranch. Then we both could pitch in and do fer your interests, as well as fer our own, what two folks separate can't do as well. See?"

Every one could see plainly what Sary meant, and no one had the heart to ruin her romance by trying to show Jeb that he was a doomed Benedict if he allowed himself to be so beguiled by a scheming widow.

"Jeb, if there's any one on earth who can make me leave Pebbly Pit, let me know who it is, and Ah'll mighty soon fight it out with him!" declared Sam Brewster, fervently.

Mrs. Brewster and the girls laughed at his intensity, but Jeb's face lighted up with relief, while Sary's clouded with doubt. Then Jeb led the horses away, and a happy whistle sounded from his lips as he marched towards the barn. And Sary stood looking after his receding form as if she was seeing her future happiness vanish, also.

The weary riders went indoors, and after Mrs. Brewster had removed her riding togs, she went

to the kitchen to see what was ready for supper. To her joy, she found Sary had prepared an unusually tempting meal, and had everything in readiness to serve. The table had been set in the living-room, as it was too dark to eat under the trees; and soon after the girls had washed and changed their clothes, all sat down to enjoy the well-cooked and carefully seasoned viands.

Sary and Jeb had had supper, *a la tete-a-tete,* more than an hour before the riders got home, so Sary gave her attention to waiting on the famished family. As she served and passed dishes, she conversed volubly about the mine, and the claim, and the trouble so much work would make for Mr. Brewster, if he kept on with the ranch at the same time.

"Not at all, Sary. Ah shall have nothing to do with the work at the mine. John and his engineers will look after all that. But this does not mean that Jeb must always remain a hired man. If the time comes when he wants to settle down at Pebbly Pit and take to himself a spouse, Ah shall be the first man to reach out a hand to help him on in life. He shall have certain parts of the ranch to work on shares, if he prefers that, and he can build a good home for himself down on the road that runs by the pastures."

"You-all ain't sayin' this in a joke, be yuh, Sam Brewster?" asked Sary, breathlessly.

"No, indeed, Sary. Ah want Jeb to make a good match, that's all. He seldom goes away from the ranch, other than driving to Oak Creek, and he does not have opportunity to see or meet girls. So Ah am seriously thinking of giving him a vacation, very soon, and sending him to Denver for a week or two, just to give him a chance to get acquainted with other women; and then he'll be able to judge what sort of a girl will suit him best for a wife."

Sary gasped fearfully at this unexpected plan of Sam Brewster's, and her grasp on the soup-ladle relaxed so that it fell to the floor with a ringing echo. But she paid no attention to it; she stood with mouth open staring at the master of Pebbly Pit.

Mrs. Brewster felt sincerely sorry for her, but the four girls had to smother their laughter behind the dinner napkins. Then Sary found her power of speech.

"Why, Sam Brewster! You-all can't mean that! Send dear, innocent Jeb to such a wicked city as Denver, all alone, to be caught by them ravenin' wolves? Ain't you hear'n tell of flirty gals what goes about vampin' nice young men jus'

fer a good time? Like as not our Jeb'll get lassoed by one of 'em, and she'll marry him fer his money, er git it all away from him afore she lets him go. Ah've seen it all, over and over again, in the movies at Oak Crick!" Sary almost wept as she described the lamentable case of Jeb if he was permitted to visit Denver, alone.

"Don't worry over Jeb, Sary. He hasn't gone yet," said Mrs. Brewster, sending her husband a signal to keep quiet.

Sary went out of the room, and when Polly called for a cup, no one replied. So she had to jump up and go to the kitchen for her own cup, but the kitchen was empty—no Sary to be seen, anywhere. Polly reported this discovery when she came back to the table, and Mrs. Brewster spoke impatiently to her husband.

"You haven't any judgment about love affairs, Sam! Don't you know that you are actually throwing Jeb at Sary's head by saying such things, as you did—about giving Jeb enough vacation to allow him to go to the city and find a pretty girl for himself?"

Mr. Brewster sat back in his chair and dropped his fork upon the table in surprise. He turned wondering eyes at his wife as he said: "Ah only said that to show Sary that she must bide her

time with Jeb, and give him a chance to make an honest choice for a wife."

"That's what you *wanted* to do, Sam, but what you actually accomplished was to give Sary a fright over having Jeb get out of her snare, and now she'll move heaven and earth to consummate her own schemes to get Jeb. I wouldn't be one bit surprised if we should find out that she is, even now, helping Jeb at the barn and trying to wheedle him into an out and out proposal. There!" was Mrs. Brewster's reply.

At that, Sam Brewster jumped up, and without asking to be excused, rushed away and down the road that led to the barns. Mrs. Brewster, with the girls, laughed at his sudden departure, and when supper was over, with the master of the house still absent, they all cleared away the meal and piled up the dishes for Sary to wash in the morning. Then Mr. Brewster came back.

"Well, Mary! You must have second sight, is all Ah can say. Sary was out helping Jeb with the horses, sure enough. And Ah overheard her sayin', when Ah came up to the door: 'Jeb, if you-all ever has time to go visitin' to Denver, or any such place, it would be a fine honeymoon for me and you, woulden' it?' "

As Mr. Brewster repeated Sary's words, he

glanced at his wife, but every one laughed heartily at his expression and Sary's clever anticipation of Jeb's vacation. Mrs. Brewster wagged her head wisely, as she said:

"Didn't I tell you so, Sam? Now Sary will have no rest, nor indeed give poor Jeb any peace of mind, until she has him firmly attached to her by vows."

"Well, Mary, after this experience Ah swear Ah shall have nothing more to do in trying to break up any matches. No, not even if my own children plan to marry without having due time to judge what is best for them!"

"Now, girls—all off to bed at once, if you expect to go with us at daybreak," was Mrs. Brewster's advice that cut the conversation short.

"I have no objections to tumbling into bed," confessed Polly.

"Nor I. If it were not for that ride tomorrow, I could sleep all day," added Eleanor, hiding a yawn.

But what happened the next day and the days that follow is another story. Who was Kenneth Evans? Did John Brewster love Anne Stewart? What happened on Top Notch Trail? These and other queries are answered in the second volume called: "Polly and Eleanor."